John Guy

Indian Temple Sculpture

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This innovative book is themed around Indian temple arts as instruments of worship – devotional sculptures which embody, through the combined authority of the aesthetic and the symbolic, powerful religious experiences. It examines Indian religious sculpture in the temple context – its cosmological meaning, its function within the architectural schema and its dynamic interactive role in worship. Accessible and multidisciplinary in its approach, *Indian Temple Sculpture* reveals the vivid traditions still in practice today, and opens up a world of understanding about Indian devotional art.

The origins of sculptural imagery and the emergence of a formalised pantheon of deities which paralleled the growth of temple building are explored, along with the later codification of art-making as reflected in the medieval artists' manuals (*śāstras*). These guides dictated not only form but also *rasa*, the emotional authority of a work of art. The temple setting is presented and the place of sculpture in it examined through the eyes of the devotee. The principal deities are presented through their myths and manifestations.

Illustrated through the V&A's unrivalled collection of South Asian sculpture, this book introduces the reader to the principal iconographic forms in the three ancient religions of the Indian subcontinent, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, conveying a picture of the richness of India's religious imagery and providing keys to its understanding. The sculptures are contextualised with selected archival images and contemporary photographs of Indian temple festivals and worship.

150 colour plates,
50 black and white illustrations,
1 map

£35.00

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John Guy

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V&A Publications

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Designed by Adam Brown, 01.02
New V&A photography by Mike Kitcatt and
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Front jacket illustration:
Śiva and Pārvatī (Uma Maheśvara), detail. See pl.146

Back jacket illustration: The enthroned icon of Śiva, bejewelled and garlanded, receiving offerings during the Panguni Uttiram festival parade at Sri Kapaliśvara Temple, Mylapore, Chennai. Photograph by R. Eswarraj, March 2003.

Frontispiece: Sūrya the Sun God, represented standing erect and holding lotus blossoms, emblematic of his life-giving powers, and accompanied by his entourage of attendants and subsidiary deities. At his feet stands his consort Prabhā, and on the mouldings below Sūrya's charioteer Aruṇa drives the seven-horse chariot. Sūrya wears high boots, a memory of his origins as a west Asian solar deity. Bihar, eastern India. 12th century, Pala period. Black basalt. Height 1.68 m. V&A: 929 (IS)

Pages 6–7: Relief depicting the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī, detail. See pl.122, p.112
Pages 174–5: A male Saivite devotee gathering flowers, detail. See pl.109, p.101

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Preface

An overwhelming impression a visitor to India gets is of the way in which religious activity pervades all aspects of daily life – the integration of everyday living and devotion is almost seamless. A second impression, which follows on quickly from the first, is of the sheer scale of religious activity and the bewildering array of deities that populate the religious landscape. This troubled the twelfth-century Śaiva poet-saint Basavanna, who wrote:

> *Gods, gods, there are so many there's no place left to put a foot.*
> *There is only one god. He is our Lord of the Meeting Rivers [Śiva].*
> Basavanna, hymn 563, (Ramanujan, 1973: 84)

Monotheism, multiplicity, manifestations and personifications – these are the constant themes that run through the stream of Indian religious thought and its most tangible expression, the sculptural temple arts. Indian traditional religions and their arts also continue to confound the outsider with their insistence on juxtaposing the ancient and the modern, reflecting the system's ability to re-invent itself. There is no single static hierarchy of divine forms; rather, the gods appear and re-appear at their own volition. Hence, any description of the pantheon is doomed to incompleteness. The approach here has not been to attempt to be encyclopaedic but rather to be selective, focusing on the seminal deities and their key forms.

The everyday reality of Hinduism for the devotee is of a world populated by an enormous (indeed unnumbered) cast of gods, demi-gods, saints and ascetics, who exist alongside local cult deities and deified heroes. At the pinnacle of this vast theatre preside three supreme gods: Śiva, the embodiment of creative energy and its seeds of destruction; Viṣṇu, whose role is to protect the universe from the forces of disintegration and periodically restore order; and Devī, the personification of female power. All of these gods can assume forms that are variously benign or fearsome, through their numerous manifestations.

Indian Temple Sculpture aims to assist those interested in the temple arts of India to access the subject in a way that presents its seemingly bewildering multi-layering of meanings and apparent (and actual) complexities in an accessible form. Much of what appears here is a synthesis of a large and often demanding literature on Indian religions and the role of devotional art, presented through the filter of my study of temple arts – principally sculpture – and my own observations and study of devotional practices. The emphasis therefore falls on Hindu beliefs, imagery and worship, which are most prevalent in the subcontinent today, but also on Jain and Buddhist practices, both historical and contemporary. Indian religious sculptures in the temple context are examined – their cosmological meaning, how they function within the architectural schema and their dynamic interactive role in worship.

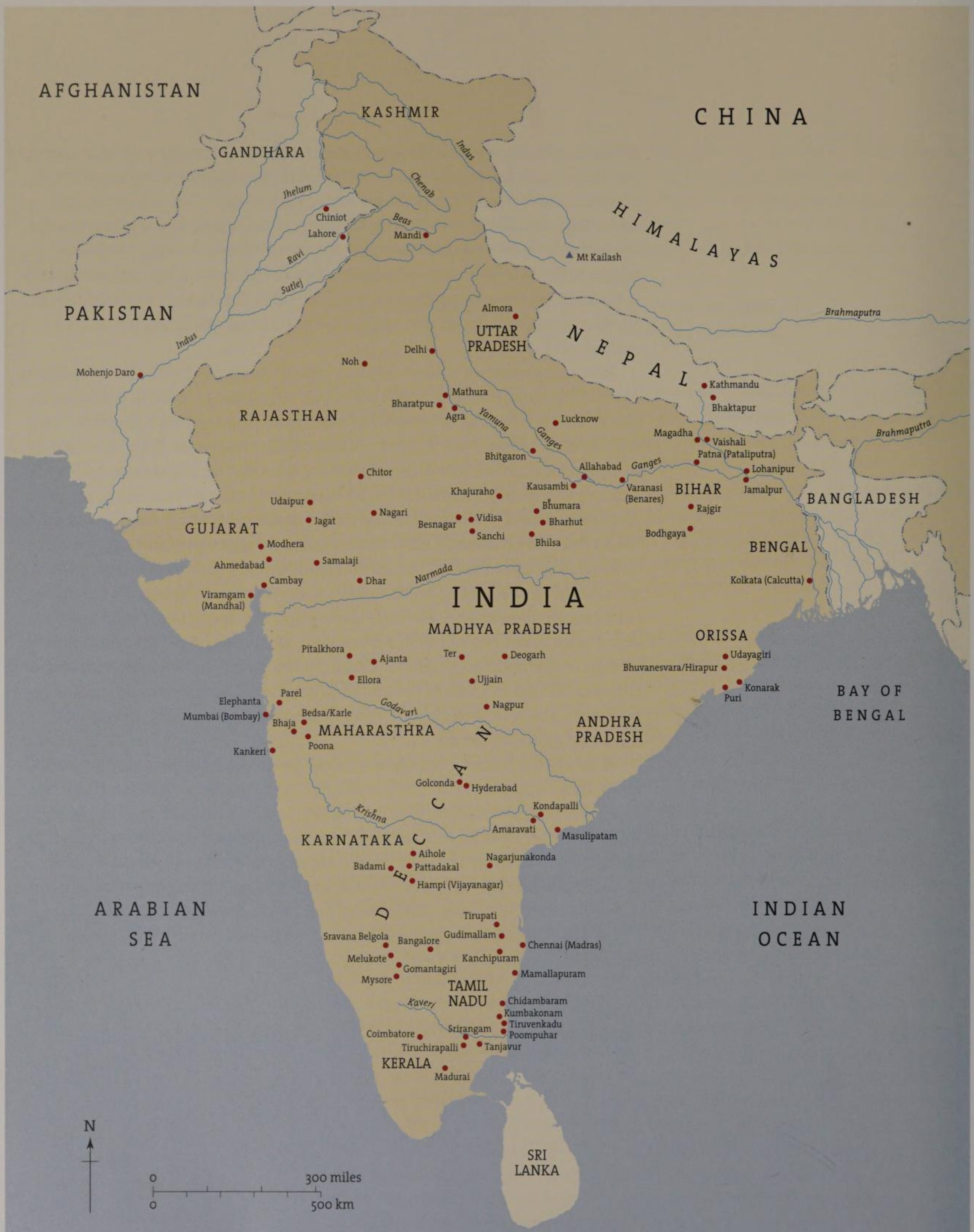
It is my hope that this approach will provide a way into this rich and fascinating subject, although it must be stressed that this is but one approach to a subject that defies a single set of definitions. Traditional Indian religions and the art forms to which they give expression carry different meanings for different followers. Much of the meaning is time specific and geographically defined, rendering generalizations flawed from the outset. Generalizations are nonetheless necessary in order to present a panoramic view of the religious arts of the Indian

subcontinent. There will undoubtedly be specific details to which some readers can offer alternative interpretations, or for which they can describe divergent ritual practices and recount different explanatory mythologies. This in part reflects the lack of a clearly defined single philosophy in Brahmanism and acknowledges the multiplicity of streams of thought that are embodied in Indian traditional religions: this is in the nature of a complex and dynamic religious system that has at its core the power to transform itself. Add to this the reverence attached to the revelatory religious experience and we are witnessing a belief system in continuous flux.

This book examines Indian sculpture both in the context of the temple schema of which it forms an essential component – integral to its meaning and function – and as a tool of worship, animated by priestly ritual and personal devotion. The efficacy of an image – its effectiveness in worship – is affected both by the way it is made by the artist/artisan (*sthapati*), and by the way that it is approached by the devotee. Correct procedures need to be followed in both cases. Guidance for the maker is provided by the *śāstras*, and for the devotee, usually guided by a priest, by the *āgama* texts concerned with ritual. The origins of sculptural imagery and the emergence of a pantheon of deities that paralleled the growth of temple building are examined, along with the later codification of art-making as reflected in the medieval artist's manuals (*śāstras*) – guides that dictated not only form but also *rasa*, the emotional authority of a work of art. The principal deities are presented through their myths and manifestations. The major iconographic forms in the three traditional religions of the Indian subcontinent, Hinduism, Jainism and Buddhism, are described, conveying a picture of the iconographic richness of India's religious imagery.

Artists in the Indian subcontinent have been making sculptures of the gods for more than 2,000 years. This study is devoted to the products of their activity: the making of religious sculptures in clay, stone, metal, wood and ivory. The oldest date from the early centuries BCE, the bulk from the high point of monumental temple building in India in what can be broadly termed the 'medieval' period, from the sixth to the sixteenth centuries. The study is illustrated through the Victoria and Albert Museum's extensive collection of South-Asian sculpture, contextualized by the use of both archival and contemporary photographs of Indian temple sculpture in worship.

John Guy
London, 2007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Allahabad
Lohanipur
Jamalpur
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Varanasi (Benares)
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Khajuraho
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Besnagar
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Mysore
TAMIL NADU
Chidambaram
Kaveri
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Acknowledgements

During the course of the writing of this book I travelled widely in India, studying the temple context and placement of sculptures, observing the enactment of temple ritual and worship (*pūjā*), and documenting a number of temple festivals, notably in Tamilnadu, Karnataka and Kerala. I was assisted in this research by funded travel from the Victoria and Albert Museum and by a Getty Foundation Curatorial Research Grant, to both of which I am indebted. In my research I have benefited from the generous guidance of many colleagues and friends in India. I especially wish to thank, in New Delhi, Dr K. Vatsyayan, whose work continues to inspire, in Chennai, Dr R. Nagaswamy and V. K. Rajamani for their friendship and wisdom, and in Bangalore, Dr C. Nandagopal, for sharing Melukote with me, and many others along the way.

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Notes to the reader

Dating system: BCE/CE, 'Before the Common Era' and 'Common Era', have been used throughout, in preference to BC/AD.

Diacritical marks and pronunciation: diacritics on Indian words, principally Sanskrit, have been used throughout, with the exception of place and dynastic names, to assist with a phonetic approximation. Hence: ā = f*a*ther, ī = l*i*tre, ū = b*oo*t, ṛ = p*r*etty, ṁ, ṅ, ṇ = si*ng*, ś = *sh*.

Glossary: all words that appear in the text in *italics* may be found in the glossary (pp.186–91). Names of principal deities and important places are included, but not italicized in the text.

Religious Sculpture of the Indian Subcontinent

1

Sacred word, sacred image

At the heart of Indian religious practice is the recitation of the sacred word, distilled in its purest form to a simple syllable or *mantra*. The paramount significance attached to sound as the very source of creation is as old as Brahmanical ritual itself – certainly reaching into the second millennium BCE, and has its origins even further back in the Vedic past of Indian proto-history. This profound veneration for sacred sound was given expression in the concept of supreme knowledge (*śruti*) obtained through direct revelation. The divine form of the early gods was first given expression through ritual gesture. Only in the later periods, around the second century BCE, did these concepts of divinity find expression in the form of icons of the pantheons of gods, principally Brahmanical (later termed Hindu), and associated Buddhist and Jain deities.

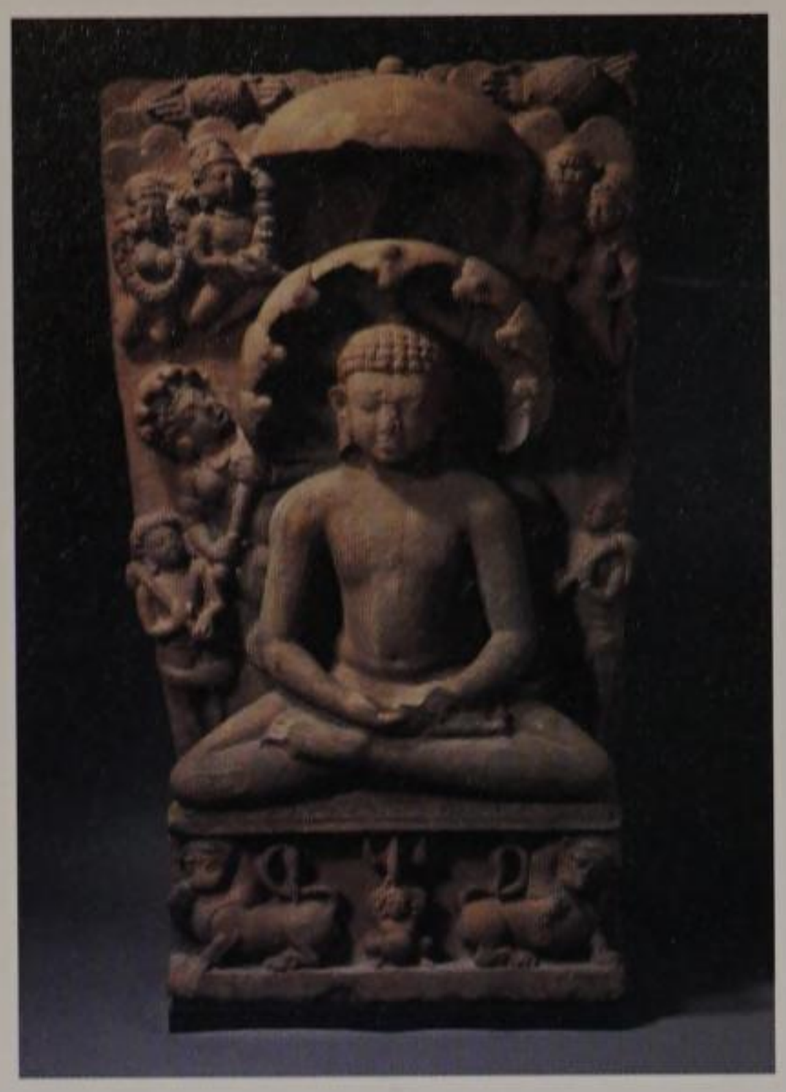
The art of sculpture in India was, like most other expressions of early artistic activity, directly linked to the sacred realm. Its existence as an art form evolved from an ancient tradition of freestanding image-making associated with the veneration of nature spirits, represented by the myriad forces inhabiting trees, rocks, rivers and the earth itself, together with living creatures, most notably snakes and birds (pl.1). In all probability such images were installed beneath trees, in forest groves and by rivers, whose spirits they were seen to embody (pl.2); alternatively, the deified elements were worshipped in the form of natural phenomena, such as unusual rock formations, or even an anthill, the abode of snakes (pl.4).

These cult practices were widespread in the first millennium BCE, as both the inscriptional record and early religious literature testify. Early period inscriptions associate wells with *nāga* cults and so on,[1] although no temple remains are recognizable to us today. Buddhist texts are particularly informative, providing references to these personified force of nature, some of which carry over into the Brahmanical pantheon of gods. In one of the earliest surviving Buddhist texts, the *Culla Niddesa*, a commentary on *sūtras* traditionally attributed to the Buddha's disciple Sāriputta (fourth century BCE), the author recorded that outside Buddhism a number of cults were practised, devoted to the worship of the earth spirits (*yakśas* and *yakśīs*), snakes (*nāgas*) and mythical birds (*garuḍas* and *suparṇas*), along with the sun (Sūrya), the moon (Chandra) and a number of Vedic gods, Agni (fire), Indra (weather god) and Brahmā (god of sacrifice), and the newly emerging cults of Vāsudeva and Baladeva.[2] Sāriputta's mention of the folk deities Vāsudeva and Baladeva is one of the earliest recorded references to these deities, whose cults persist today embodied in the worship of Viṣṇu and Balarāma.

There can be little doubt that these deities were worshipped in sculpted forms, of which stone sculptures of *yakśas* and *yakśīs* from the early centuries BCE are among the oldest survivors. The second-century BCE Besnagar (ancient Vidisa) pillar inscription of Heliodorus, a convert to the cult of Vāsudeva, makes it clear

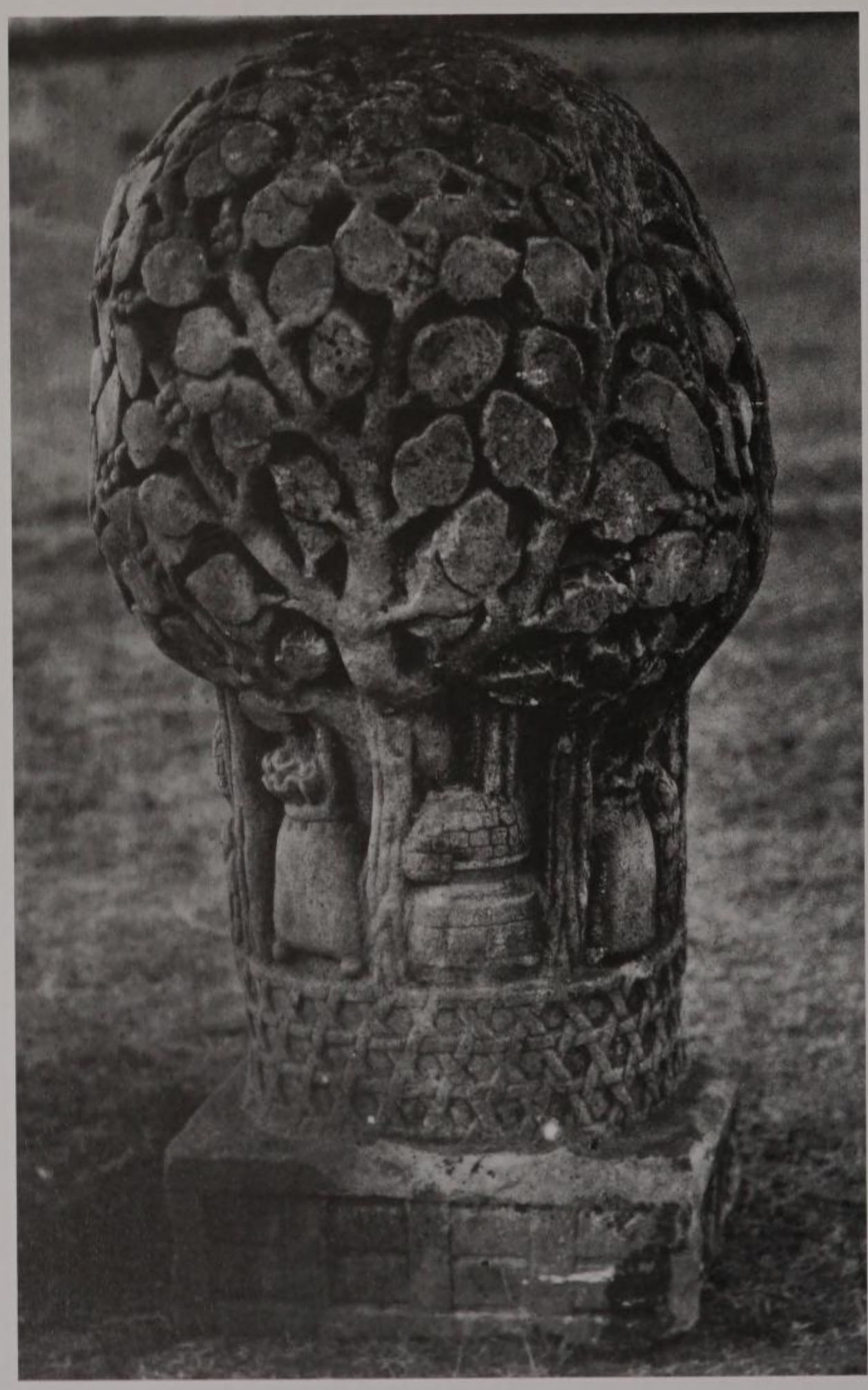
1

◀ **Pārśvanātha, the twenty-third Jain *tīrthaṇkara* *(detail*, full view p.14*)*. The meditating yogic, here a Jina protected by a *nāga*, an early iconographic form that merges anthropomorphised deities and animistic nature spirits. Gyaraspur, near Bhilsa, Madhya Pradesh. Early 7th century. Sandstone. Height 130.8 cm. V&A: IS.18–1956**



that Vāsudeva was worshipped in physical form, and that his image was installed in a defined sacred space, be it shrine or open enclosure.[3] Another inscription of around this time, the Ghosundi inscription, found at Nagari, near Chitor, records the erecting of an 'enclosing wall round the stone objects of worship, called Nārāyana-vatika, for the divinities Samkarshana [Balarāma] and Vāsudeva'.[4] Both are hero-gods (*vīra*), and the worshipper describes himself as a 'Bhagavat', a devotee who undertook worship. This marks the beginnings of a new trend in religious activity, which ultimately led to *bhakti* – devotionalism with its associated worship (*pūjā*) activities – as the preferred mode of religious expression, as opposed to sacrifice (*yajña*), the central ritual activity of Vedism.

The earliest archaeologically recovered examples of small-scale images modelled in clay or carved in stone, dating from the beginning of the second millennium BCE, were excavated at the urban centre of Mohenjo Daro in the Indus Valley, Pakistan. After a long gap in the archaeological record, they reappeared at settlement sites in the Mauryan period (326–*c.*185 BCE). The sculptural record of many of these cults makes its earliest appearance in the form of small-scale clay and terracotta votive images, which were made for personal use in the home and for placing in outdoor shrines (pl.5). Female fertility figures, often called mother



2

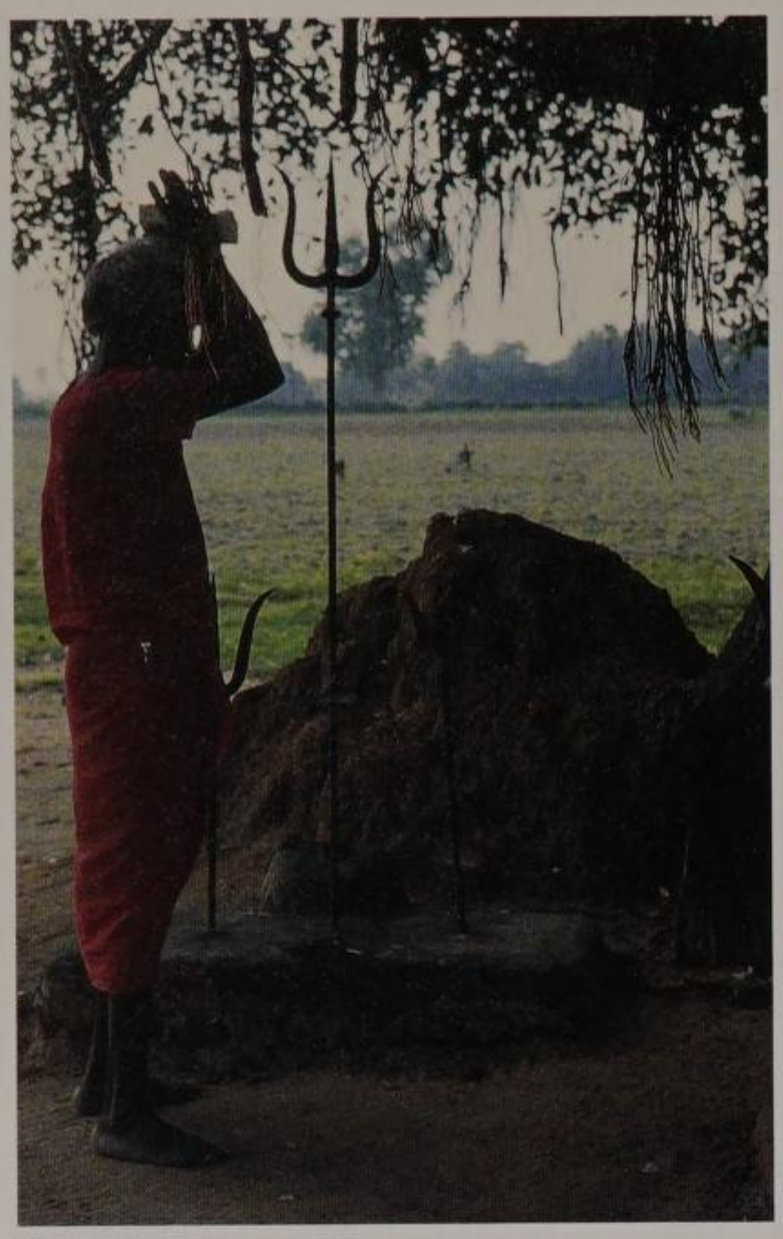
▶ Fortune-granting tree (*yakśa-caitya*), surrounded by pots, bags, conch and lotus, all exuding coins, motifs associated with Kubera, the chief of the *yakśas* who became the god of riches and treasure (over which he guards). Capital from a pillar-standard (*dhvaja-stambha*). Besnagar, ancient Vidisa, Madhya Pradesh. Attributed to 1st century BCE, Sunga period. Sandstone. Height 172.6 cm. India Museum, Kolkata. India Office, British Library

3

▶ Nāgarāja, a snake-king, lord of the subterranean underworld. From Chargaon, near Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. Inscribed and dated to the 40th year of the Kushan ruler Huvisaka, equivalent to CE 167. Sandstone. Government Museum, Mathura. V&A SSEA Archive.

goddesses, dominate this genre of early image making (pl.6). The worship of these female cult figures was widespread, judging from their frequent appearance at early urban centres of northern India such as Mathura, Kausambi, Vaisali, and Rajghat and Chandraketugarh.[5] Significant numbers were recovered from the excavations undertaken at Sonkh, Mathura, which have secure stratigraphies spanning the sixth century BCE through the Mauryan, Sunga, Kushan and Gupta periods.[6]

According to the second-century BCE grammarian Patañjali, the Mauryan rulers were instrumental in the manufacture and sale of religious images for profit.[7] The most plentiful religious images of this era are the terracotta female figurines, and this contemporary description of commercial production suggests a state workshop production, a remarkable occurrence in the early propagation of the popular use of religious imagery. It also points, at an early period, to new religious cults being quickly disseminated across northern India along the



4

▲ A devotee worshipping at a Śaiva shrine in the form of an anthill, the abode of snakes, attendants of Śiva. Rural shrine, Tanjavur District, Tamilnadu, 1995. Photograph by the author

overland trade routes. This was undoubtedly the means by which the teachings of the Buddha, and those of Mahāvīra (the founder of Jainism), were so widely spread and taken up with enthusiasm by the merchant, trading and craft communities who became their strongest followers and most active patrons.

Monumental stone sculptures – freestanding and carved in the round – began to appear from around the third century BCE, as witnessed spectacularly by the great *yakśas* from Parkham (near Mathura, Uttar Pradesh) (pl.7) and Noh (Rajasthan), and by the massive figure at Besnagar (near Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh), contemporary with the donor inscription honouring Vasudeva mentioned above.[8] A monumental *yakśī* from Besnagar makes it clear that the female cult also attracted cult following (pl.8). The tradition of carving such imposing images continued into the Kushan period, as seen by the so-called *yakśī* from Didarganj, in fact a female with flywhisk (*cāmara*), perhaps one of a pair who attended a shrine or *stūpa* entrance.

The *yakśī* figures that decorated the formal gateways (*toraṇas*) to a *stūpa* or shrine were the most important inheritors of this tradition (pl.9). These are icons of extraordinary robustness and power, reflecting an already highly accomplished sculptural tradition, one which must have learnt its skills in another medium – most probably the manufacture of wooden sculptures to serve the followers of these nature cults. The wooden prototype is alluded to in the early Buddhist and Jain literatures, which both expressly refer to the making of sandalwood images. According to Jain canonical legends, *yakśa* cult images were widely worshipped and annually renewed by painting.[9] This mature tradition of wood and stone sculpture-making undoubtedly provided both the conceptual imagery and mechanical skills needed in turn to give form to images of the new gods.

The *yakśa* and *yakśī* tradition of freestanding stone sculptures was swiftly adapted to serve the needs of the mainstream religions as they emerged in the subcontinent. *Yakśas* were quickly recruited as door guardians in rock-cut shrines, as witnessed at Bhaja, Kondane, Junnar and Pitalkhora, all sites in Maharasthra. More significantly, they provided the prototype for the monumental standing Buddha image of the Kushan period. The greatest witness to this tradition is the standing Buddha donated by the monk Bala in 130 BCE (pl.11). The figure is robust, muscular and resembles a warrior king. The earliest sculptural representations of Viṣṇu drew on the same models. Seated figures reflect another model, that of the meditating yogi which was such a strong presence in the late Vedic and Brahmanical world. The earliest seated figures were depictions of a Jina or Buddha, seated in a yogic posture, sometimes meditating, or actively communicating with the devotee through expression and gesture (pl.10). Undoubtedly the early faiths of India competed with one another in image making, the innovations of one serving as a spur to the others.

By the third to second centuries BCE *stūpa* worship, which had its origins in the veneration of ancestral remains buried in spherical mounds, was established in both Jain and Buddhist contexts, as witnessed at the rock-cut Buddhist shrine in the Barabar Hills, north of Bodhgaya (Bihar) (pl.28). The *chaiya* hall-type entrance has an associated inscription dated to the tenth year of the Mauryan emperor Aśoka's reign (mid-third century BCE). Large-scale *stūpas*, each complete with elaborately decorated gateways (*toraṇa*), railings (*vedikā*) and pillars (*stambha*), were a feature of the religious landscape by this time (pl.14). At Mathura, known in contemporary sources as the 'city of the gods', the sandstone remains excavated at various sites demonstrate the religious diversity of this great city of the Kushan era. The Kankali Tila site revealed predominantly Jain images, the Katra mound Buddhist images (although the site has an earlier Vaiṣṇava history, being

5

▶ Wayside shrine of three seated figures in an enclosure, probably a mother-cult shrine. Receptacles at their feet would have served as oil lamps for worship. North India. 2nd–4th century, Kushan–Gupta periods. Terracotta. Width 27.8 cm. V&A: IS.235–1961

6

▼ Female figurine. A fertility icon in which the pubic area is the dominant feature. Sar Dheri region, Gandharan, Pakistan. *c.*2nd century BCE–1st century CE. Terracotta. Height 9 cm. V&A: IS.20A–1951

identified as the birthplace of Kṛṣṇa). The Jamalpur mound revealed Buddhist sculptures associated with a monastery named in inscriptions as Huvishka Vihāra, which in all probability displaced an earlier *nāga* shrine. The Sonkh excavations of 1971 revealed traces of a Kushan *nāga* shrine, including a lintel from a *toraṇa* associated with an apsidal temple.[10] The lintel depicts an enthroned Nāgaraja and Nāgini, flanked by male and female devotees and donors. This find makes it clear that *nāga* cult shrines continued to be commissioned well into the Kushan period at Mathura, and to co-exist with the new emerging orthodoxies. A Buddhist relief from Kankali Tila depicting the infant Buddha's first bath, attended by venerating *nāgas* submitting to the spiritual authority of his Buddha nature, makes clear the relationship that was emerging between the old and new faiths.[11]

In another illustration of the subjugation of the nature cults by the new religions, we witness in the Buddhist centres of Amaravati and Nagarjunakonda, in Andhra Pradesh, a popular scene in which the Bodhisattva as King Māndhātā crushes a *nāga* beneath his foot. This Māndhātāvadana scene was directly replicated in Hindu sculptures depicting Kṛṣṇa subduing the *nāga* Kāliya.[12] The weight of evidence points to the Buddhist version coming first, but it is also clear that this was not an isolated instance of borrowing or appropriation of religious imagery and its affiliated legends, recast to fit the requirements of the competing faith. Such themes and sets of associated imagery were commonly shared across faiths. The most pervasive image is that of the seven-hooded *nāga* both sheltering and revering the Jina Pārśvanātha and the Buddha in closely related stories; it assumes a similar dual role in relation to the Śiva *liṅga*. Such scenes share the essential iconographic components and differ only in the myths attached to them (pls.1 and 12).

Relief sculptures also began appearing on the *stūpas* and accompanying gateways, and on the carved slabs installed to mark auspicious sites and designed to receive offerings (*silapata* and *āyāgapaṭa*). The representations of a Jina or the Buddha in the centre of these offering slab designs are among the oldest figurative depictions known of them. Jain and Buddhist sites shared in these

7

▶ *Yakśa*, Parkham, near Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. Inscription states that it was 'made by [donated?] Bhadapugarin...Gomitaka, a disciple of Kunika'. The practice of installing large-scale *yakśa* cult images complete with donor inscriptions sets a precedent for Buddhist and Jain practices that followed soon after. 1st century BCE, Sunga period. Sandstone. Height 2.62 m. Government Museum, Mathura

8

▶ *Yakśī*, a deified female nature spirit. Photographed in situ at the village of Besnagar, ancient Vidisa, Madhya Pradesh. Late 1st century BCE, late Mauryan or Sunga period. Sandstone. Height 1.9 m. Indian Museum, Kolkata

developments, and in many cases the sectarian affiliation of Kushan-period architectural fragments surviving from Mathura are unclear. They could equally belong to a monument of either faith, as seen in a *toraṇa* crossbeam decorated with turbaned figures and winged lions, generic motifs of the period (pl.15).

Other fragments have iconographic clues that suggest a particular religious allegiance. A majestic griffin – a hybrid creature exhibiting the features of lion, bird and aquatic creature – once formed the capital to a ceremonial pillar, a *stambha*, guarding the entrance to a religious site. The form of the creature's tail resembles a plough, suggesting an association with Balarāma, an agricultural deity closely linked to the Vāsudeva-Kṛṣṇa cult and later directly linked to Kṛṣṇa in the Purāṇic literature (pl.15).[13] The imagery of the winged griffin is itself a non-Indian borrowing, imported from Achaemenid culture. The lion, winged griffin and eagle were all motifs adapted from west Asia, where their roles as emblems of kingship and royal power made them attractive to foreign rulers such as the Mauryan rulers of Pataliputra (modern Patna) and the Kushans who ruled from Afghanistan to Mathura.

The mythical bird *garuḍa*, a west Asian device symbolizing the fire of the sun's rays, was absorbed into both Buddhist legend (pl.16) and the newly emerging Vaiṣṇava cult. It became the paramount Vaiṣṇava symbol, as witnessed by its adoption as Viṣṇu's official vehicle (*vāhana*), securing Viṣṇu's solar associations. An indication of the significance of this symbolism is conveyed by the early Gupta rulers choosing the *garuḍa* as their royal insignia.[14] The mythical bird on a pillar, the *garuḍa-stambha*, became a permanent feature of the temple tradition from this time, although its appearance can be traced to as early as the second-century BCE at Besnagar, near the ancient capital of Vidisa (Bhilsa) (pl.17). The *garuḍa* can also be found at the top of a standard (*garuḍa-dhvaja*), as observed on the balustrade from Bharhut from the beginning of the first century BCE, where it is carried by a horseman (pl. 25.).

These and other imported motifs such as the lion capital were readily combined with indigenous ones. Hence we witness motifs such as the sacred goose (*hamsa*), which has Vedic origins, combined with palmette motifs of west

9

▶ A gateway bracket decorated with a *yakśī* holding a flowering tree, repeated on the reverse side. The figures wear courtly jewellery, including ear-lobe ornaments and an elaborate belt and sash that secures a diaphanous skirt. This bracket belonged to a ceremonial gateway (*toraṇa*) marking an entrance to a shrine, most probably a Buddhist *stūpa*. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. 2nd century CE, Kushan period. Sandstone. Height 51 cm. V&A: IM.72 and 73–1927

10

▶ Seated Buddha, with highly developed physique displaying 'inner breath' (*prāṇa*) beneath the articulated folds of the monastic robes. The yogic posture is combined with a communicative Buddha type, gesturing to his followers. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. Early 3rd century, Kushan period. Sandstone. Height 68 cm. V&A: IS.231–2006. Purchased with the assistance of the Art Fund, the Anthony Gardner Memorial Fund and a private donor

11

▼ Standing Buddha. Inscription states that the monk Bala donated it in the third year of the Kushan ruler Kanishka, equivalent to *c.*130 CE. It is carved in Mathuran red sandstone and may be assumed to have been imported from Mathura to Sarnath, where it was installed. The Buddha is represented as the hero-type (*vīra*), styled on princely models of the day. Excavated near the Jagat Singh *stūpa*, Sarnath. Sandstone. Height 2.48 m. Sarnath Museum, Bihar

Asian origin on the stone throne sculptured in the third century BCE to mark the site on which the Buddha achieved enlightenment (pl.18). Even the enigmatic ring-stones that have been predominantly found at Pataliputra combine west Asian animal and plant motifs with standing female figures, generally identified as 'mother goddesses', together with tree and other foliate motifs (pl.19). The Buddhist *triratna* (three jewels) – which is traditionally considered to be symbolic of the Buddha, his teachings (*dharma*) and the community of monks (*saṅgha*) – bears a close resemblance to the floral capital design adopted in Mauryan art from west Asia.

The image house

There is both visual and inscriptional evidence that shrines and image houses were built in the early centuries BCE. Some would appear to have been made of stone: the site of Nagari, near Chitor, which yielded an inscription from around the second century BCE, is marked by the stone remains of an enclosure wall (*prākāra*), and is one of the oldest archaeological sites to yield direct evidence of a shrine-related structure. As noted, the inscription tells us that the structure was dedicated to Balarāma and Vāsudeva, who were present in some form.

Shrines dedicated to Vāsudeva and to *vīras* (hero-cult deities) are similarly described in inscriptions at Mathura, which add specific reference to the presence of railings enclosing the sanctuary (*vedikā*) and a gateway (*toraṇa*), both important features of Mathuran temple, shrine and *stūpa* sites. A second-century Kushan lintel provides remarkably vivid information on the appearance and variety of such shrines (pl.20). The scene depicts an assembly of princely figures making offerings – most hold lotus stems – at a central shrine of complex barrel-vaulted design from which emerges a tree. The sectarian affiliation is confirmed by the right-hand scene of two worshippers venerating a wheel mounted on a lion capital. This is a *cakrastambha*, an important symbol of Buddhist law (*dharma*). To the left of the lintel is depicted a three-storey shrine-tower; it is unclear whether it housed a Buddha image, or perhaps relics. The absence of a Buddha image may be more to do with the theological position of the patron of this lintel regarding the depiction of the Buddha in iconic form. Although it is clear – as witnessed by the monk Bala's patronage of the great Sarnath Buddha – that many Buddhists favoured using figurative depictions of the Buddha, others did not and used symbolic devices only (pl.22). A relief-panel depiction of a seated Buddha in a shrine – built or rock cut is unclear – supports the possibility that such shrines already served as image houses (pl.21). Tree shrines were also a feature of early Hindu sites, as witnessed by the Kushan relief depiction of an open-air *liṅga* shrine, sited beneath a tree (pl.23). The *liṅga* appears to be enclosed within

12

▶ Buddha offering protection to his devotees, sheltered by the *nāga* Mucalinda. Nagajunakonda, Andhra Pradesh. Late Amaravati style, mid-3rd century, Satavahana period. Limestone. Height 16.5 cm. V&A: IM.81–1936. Given by Mrs E.H. Hunt

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13

▲ Section of an architrave from a gateway (*toraṇa*), decorated with a man holding a fly-whisk, a griffin and a lion; probably part of a Buddhist veneration scene. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. *c.*2nd century CE, Kushan period. Sandstone. Height 27.3, length 76.8 cm. V&A: IM.1–1927

14

▲ *Stūpa* drum decoration relief, depicting a *stūpa* shrine under worship. A high-barrelled *stūpa* displaying two terraces with railings, worshipped by female spirits (*yakśī*) and heavenly (air-borne) beings. Two pillars with capitals flank the monument, one bearing a wheel-of-law (*cakra*). The *stūpa* has an enclosure fence with gateway approached from a ceremonial avenue guarded by *yakśas* in gatehouse shrines. 2nd century CE, Kushan period. Red sandstone. Height 71.1 cm. Government Museum, Mathura

a railing, although it could be interpreted as being mounted on a built platform.

Most early shrines and image-house sanctuaries were probably made of wood and thatch. Natural shelters, such as caves and rock formations, were also used. According to the Jain tradition, in the fifth to fourth centuries BCE Mahāvīra preached from *yakśa* shrines (*yakśa-caitya*).[15] Among the earliest depictions of shrines are those shown in the reliefs of the stone railing of Bharhut *stūpa*, attributed to the beginning of the first century BCE (pls.24–25). They depict Buddhist icons – the sacred *bodhi* tree, a *stūpa* – installed in a natural setting or encircled by a railing. Increasingly in the Kushan period, these are depicted in an 'urban' setting. A rarely depicted scene, that of the tree spirit *yakśa* Śākyavardhana emerging in anthropomorphic form to acknowledge the presence of the infant Buddha Śākyamuni, illustrates the type of enclosure railing erected to mark and protect venerated trees.[16] In all probability such railings were of wooden construction, which would explain the dearth of archaeological evidence for them outside the context of *stūpa* enclosures. The notable exception is the enclosure railing from Bodhgaya (pl.26). This stone railing almost certainly enclosed the tree shrine at the site, and may have been removed (and respectfully buried on the site) to make way for the first Mahābodhi temple structure.

Depictions of scenes of *stūpa* worship indicate that the Buddha images were installed in niches on the drum of the *stūpa* in northern India and in the north-west, and in an apsidal hall in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa.[17] Rock-cut cave shrines were in use from at least the third–second centuries BCE, as witnessed by Buddhist sites in Bihar and Maharasthra. They are characterized by the apsidal plan, vaulted roof and freestanding *stūpa*, as seen at Karle and Ajanta. Undoubtedly they were modelled on a freestanding wooden building prototype, no examples of which have survived, but which were meticulously replicated in these rock-cut shrines. Reference to wooden prototypes can be seen throughout in the barrel-shaped profile of the ceilings with their depictions of protruding horizontal beams and other timber structural features, mimicking thatch and timber models precisely in the living stone (pl.28). They were carved on a spectacular scale right up to the period when the structural temple first began to appear.

Brahmanical *liṅga* shrines are also represented in the first century CE in sculptural reliefs at Mathura as a simple outdoor structure, with a Śiva *liṅga* installed on a raised plinth (*pīṭha*) beneath a tree, and/or enclosed within a railing fence.[18] The existence of a number of large-scale *liṅga* datable to the first century BCE presupposes the presence of substantial enclosure structures, be they offering platforms, railings or shrines to 'house' such important cult images. Such settings

15

▼ Winged lion, the capital of a pillar (*stambha*) associated with a shrine. The winged griffin-type mythical creature is of west Asian inspiration. The distinctive tapering tail ('plough-like') may be linked to Balarāma, an early warrior deity closely linked to Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu. If so, this pillar-capital was presumably installed at the entrance to a Balarāma shrine. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. *c.*2nd century CE, Kushan period. Sandstone. Height 88 cm. V&A: IS.712–1883

16

▲ Garuḍa abducting Queen Kakati, an episode described in one of the Buddha's previous-life stories, the *Jātakas*. The Queen of Varanasi is carried off by the mythical bird, only to be returned unharmed after her king (the Bodhisattva in fact) performs an act of selfless kindness. Gandharan region, Pakistan. 3rd–4th century, Kushan period. Grey schist. Height 73 cm. V&A: IS.5–1973

17

▲ *Garuḍa-stambha*, in situ, ancient Vidisa, Madhya Pradesh. 4th century, Gupta period. American Institute of Indian Studies

make clear the continuities between the newly emerging Brahmanical icons and the animistic cults with which they co-existed and which they gradually displaced.

The use of rock-cut shrines was common to all faiths of early India. The memory of the natural cave is preserved in the small inner sanctum of the Hindu temple, the *garbhagṛha* (womb chamber). The earliest Brahmanical practices may well have been performed in natural caves in which wooden cult images were installed, or where naturally occurring forms in nature – a *liṅga*-shaped rock for example – provided the focus of worship. In the age of monumental temple building, Śiva was worshipped by one *bhakti* poet-saint as Gudhesvara, Lord of Caves. The memory of his past was kept vivid by the temple's cave-like inner sanctum, which was small, dark and damp. Bearing the name the 'womb chamber' only added a further level of meaning and resonance to this metaphor, asserting the deity's presence as the source of life.[19]

Temple building was well advanced in the early centuries CE, both under the Kushans in northern India and under the Satavahanas in the eastern Deccan. Virtually no structural temple remains have survived, apart from traces of foundations and more substantial remains of Buddhist *stūpa* mounds. The construction of memorial *stūpas*, intended to house relics in the form of corporal remains of the Buddha, was undertaken on a monumental scale under the converted Mauryan king Aśoka in the third century BCE. Many *stūpas*, such as those at Sanchi, survive from this time, having been enlarged and embellished in later periods (pl.27). The deposition of relics was an essential element in the purpose and meaning of *stūpa* worship. Relics from a number of *stūpas* in the vicinity of Sanchi, from Bhogpur (pls.30–1) and Sonari (pl.29), deposited in the late Mauryan period, are the most precious Buddhist artefacts preserved in the V&A collection.

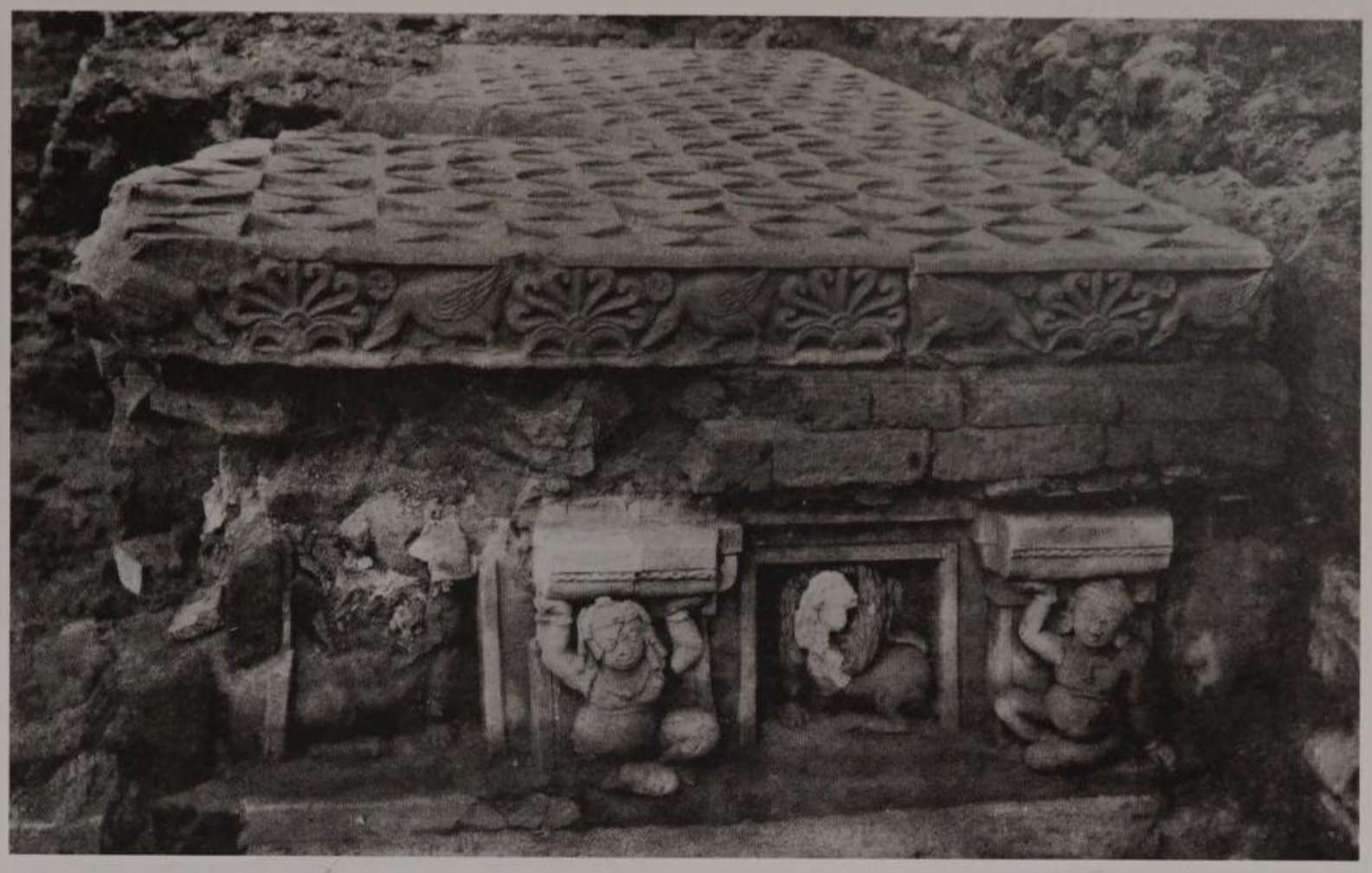
It is only from the fifth century – at the height of the Gupta era in northern India – that the freestanding structural temple emerged as the central focus of public worship. The earliest forms are square in plan and have a flat stone-slab roof covering the sanctuary and a small pillared porch, best seen today at Aihole and Sanchi. The structural temple swiftly evolved into the classic temple type: a square or rectangular platform, at first a flat-roofed structure housing the image-brick chamber, which then acquired a tapering tower, with conical *āmalaka* finial. The entrance, usually with a portico, conventionally opened to the east to receive devotees. One of the earliest depictions of image houses is the multi-storied tower, square or rectangular in plan and with a tapering profile, which appears on the plinth of a second-century Buddha image from Mathura, and on the lintel discussed above (pl.20). The tower enveloping a small sanctuary-image chamber anticipates the mountain and cave symbolism attached to later temple architecture. Among the earliest inscriptional evidence for temples is to be found at Nagarjunakonda in Andhra Pradesh, recording the installation of a wooden image of Viṣṇu in a shrine-temple structure in CE 278.[20]

The most detailed visual record of a Buddhist image house from the Gupta period is preserved in a unique terracotta seal depicting a Buddhist monastery complex (pl.32). In all probability this scene depicts Bodhgaya, as observed and described by the Chinese pilgrim Faxian in about CE 400 and by a second Chinese pilgrim, Xuanzang, in around 637.[21] Faxian noted that a tower had been erected close to the spot where the Buddha attained enlightenment.

By the late fifth or sixth century, a radical innovation occurred that set the style of the northern (*nāgara*) temple thereafter, the addition of a tapering tower (*śikhara*) superstructure positioned directly over the sanctuary. The progenitors of this style, as far as we can judge from the monumental record, are the brick temple

18

▶ *Vajrāsana*, the throne platform marking the place where the historical Buddha experienced enlightenment, on the west elevation of the Mahabodhi temple, Bodhgaya, in Bihar. Sandstone platform probably dating from the reign of Emperor Asoka, *c.*mid-3rd century BCE, Mauryan period; stucco basement figures date from a later post-Gupta renovation. Photographed during restoration undertaken in the 1880s by Alexander Cunningham



at Bhitargaon, Uttar Pradesh (late fifth century) and the Daśāvatāra temple at Deogarh, Madhya Pradesh (sixth century). Bhitargaon is of unique importance in that it preserves the oldest example of the *nāgara*-style superstructure (pl.33). The temple exterior quickly became a vehicle for elaborate and sophisticated sculptural programmes.

Deogarh's Daśāvatāra temple employs large compositions to showcase Viṣṇu in three major forms, and a subsidiary series of reliefs narrating the stories of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, among the earliest visual expositions of scenes from the epic literature to appear in Indian art. The Bhitargaon temple has an extensive programme of large terracotta reliefs, also depicting Viṣṇu-*avatāras* and scenes of *Kṛṣṇa-lila* ('Kṛṣṇa's life'). This is the most elaborate temple ornamentation schema to survive from the sixth century (pls.34–6). Henceforth, religious sculpture became not only intimately linked to the evolution of the temple, but also integral to its fabric and meaning.

With these developments we witness the emergence of the temple as the principal venue for institutionalized worship. This marks the beginnings of temple Hinduism, in which the worship of cult images was conducted in what quickly became a monumental architectural setting. The temple was hereafter established as a central platform of worship by all sects – Brahmanical, Buddhist and Jain. The style of temple architecture and sculptural adornments was largely impervious to denomination, all three faiths sharing much in terms of temple form and decorative elaboration, just as they had done earlier with the emergence of figurative icons in and around Mathura in the Kushan period.

19

▼ Ring-stone carved on the interior surface with female figures alternating with tripartite flowering stems, evoking the Buddhist *triratna* symbol. The quatrefoil lozenge pattern is also seen on the Buddha's throne seat (pl.18), perhaps suggesting a textile design. Ring-stones of this type have been recorded across northern India, from Taxila in the north-west to Patna in the east. Taxila region, Pakistan. 3rd –2nd century BCE, late Mauryan–Sunga periods. Polished sandstone. Diameter 8 cm. V&A: IS.82–1948

Icons of devotion

With the emergence of a vibrant sculptural tradition to generate images and temples to house them, the scene was set for the enactment of ritual worship. The rituals played a central role in Hinduism and, although expressed in a different form, were also paramount for Jainism and Buddhism. The growing importance of the cult image and of devotional focus upon it marked a radical departure from the Vedic emphasis on offerings in its many forms, including sacrifice. Vedism emphasized the importance of priest-directed ritual in which the lay devotee had no role to play. The newly emerging Hindu ritual shifted the emphasis from priests to devotees, empowering them for the first time to be active participants in the ritual of worship, either together with a priest in acts of public worship, or

20

▲ Lintel from a Buddhist site gateway (*toraṇa*), probably marking the entrance to a *stūpa* enclosure. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. Red sandstone. Government Museum, Mathura. V&A SSEA Archive

alone in a personal gesture of devotion or *bhakti*. The latter form of prayer was actively promoted from around the fifth century and blossomed between the sixth and tenth centuries, especially in southern India, where its most famous exponents, the poet-saints, the Śaiva *nāyanmār* and the Vaiṣṇava *ālvārs*, were elevated to sainthood status. These wandering *bhakta* dedicated their lives to composing devotional hymns and poems in praise of their lord. They were instrumental in revitalizing Hinduism and checking the advances of Jainism and Buddhism. The most revered of the *ālvārs* was Nammālvār, a tenth-century devotee whose fame was so immediate that shortly after his death, bronze sculptures were cast and installed in Vaiṣṇava temples where he is revered to this day as the very feet of the god.[22]

The performance of ritual played a central role in religious practice in the Indian subcontinent from proto-historic times. Vedic ritual, concentrated on fire sacrifices and associated offerings (*yajña*), is the oldest surviving rite known to mankind. The Vedas are attributable to at least 1000 BCE, and some of these rituals are still performed today among Brahman families, the heirs to this unbroken tradition. At the centre of Vedic cults was the celebration of fire, embodied in the deity Agni, and of Soma, an intoxicating plant and a god personifying its effects. Agni's priestly role is to oversee sacrifice. Central to the Vedic creation myth is the sacrifice of primordial man (*Puruṣa*), out of whom the cosmos emerged. He is conceived as both transcendent and material, forming the bridge between the metaphysical and material reality. Behind all Indian religious imagery is the principal of unity (*ātman*), the formless behind all form, and *Puruṣa* was the first and overriding embodiment of this principle. This concept of *Puruṣa* was already recognized in the *Ṛgveda*: '[He] pervades the earth and yet extends beyond it by ten fingers breath.'[23] The notion of standard measuring units (*pramana*) defined by the human hand is already present. We are witnessing the beginnings of an early Indian cosmology that is conceived in anthropomorphic terms – the *Puruṣa* provides the archetype of the anthropomorphic image. The earliest archetypal sculptural depictions assumed this form.

21

▲ Buddha seated in a shrine, meditating. Architectural panel depicting the Buddha in the interior of a pillared (or rock-cut) shrine. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. Early 3rd century CE, Kushan period. Pink sandstone. Height 36.8 cm. V&A: IS.120–1999. Bequest of Alexander Biancardi

A Harappan seal found at Mohenjo Daro, from the late third millennium BCE, provides a clue to the historic moment when the highly abstracted form was given more explicit anthropomorphic shape (pl.37). It depicts a 'horned' standing male figure, a bull, a tripartite-headed sacrificial post and an 'altar' with vase. Difficult as such a scene is to interpret, the essential elements of *Puruṣa* and Rudra seem to be present. Another seal reveals a seated and horned *Puruṣa*, giving all the appearances of being in deep meditation or perhaps a *soma*-induced trance, which arguably has links with Rudra-Śiva (pl.155).

Gangetic-valley copper-alloy sacrificial axes also embody in their projections the anthropomorphic elements of the primordial man, and the twisted and broken state in which they have often been found provides evidence of their apparent 'sacrifice'. The medieval form of the lesser god Nandikeśvara provides a likely extension of these concepts (pl.38), in which the horned form reveals its other aspect, as Śiva's trident (*triśūla*). As the primordial 'original man', *Puruṣa* was

22

▶ Veneration of the Empty Throne. Contending schools of Buddhist belief existed, some favouring iconic representations of the Buddha in human form, while others were opposed to such depictions. This relief, which is contemporary with many Buddha images, provides a symbolic presence for the Buddha only. The empty throne has a disc on it, most convincingly interpreted as a solar disc ('radiant') symbol of the Buddha. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. 2nd–3rd century CE, Kushan period. Red sandstone. Height 33 cm. V&A: IS.1039–1883. Given by F.A. Turton

23

▼ A *liṅga* shrine. Relief panel from Mathura. An *ekamukhaliṅga* installed for worship beneath a pipal tree, attended by two *yakśa* figures. Mathura, Utttar Pradesh. Red sandstone. Height 19 cm. State Museum, Lucknow. American Institute of Indian Studies.

24

▶ Coping stone fragment with a frieze of bells. Bharhut *stūpa* enclosure railing. This fragment once formed part of the lower frieze of the massive coping stone on the stone railing at Bharhut *stūpa* (pl.25). Bharhut, Madhya Pradesh. Late 2nd–1st century BCE, Sunga period. Sandstone. Height 20 cm. V&A: IS.69–1986

25

◀ Bharhut. Sections of the enclosure railing and a standard pillar (*stambha*) in situ at the eastern gate of the great Bharhut *stūpa*. On the corner post are depicted two noblemen, one riding an elephant and bearing a relic casket for internment, the other on horseback and carrying a *garuḍa* standard (*garuḍadhvaja*). Roundel decorations include a goddess being lustrated by elephants (Gaja-Lakṣmi) and a male and female devotee venerating a *bodhi*-tree shrine. Bharhut, Madhya Pradesh. Late 2nd–1st century BCE, Sunga period. Red sandstone. Railing height 2 m. Indian Museum, Kolkata

26

▼ Railing pillar from the original shrine enclosure at Bodhgaya, Bihar. This railing belonged to an early structure marking the site of the Buddha's enlightenment, probably enclosing the *bodhi* tree. The upper roundels depict stories from the previous lives of the Buddha (*Jātakas*). A Brahmi inscription records this pillar railing as 'the gift of the noble lady Kurangi'. 1st century CE, Sunga period. Sandstone. Height. 116 cm. V&A: IS.1065–1883. Given by F.A. Turton

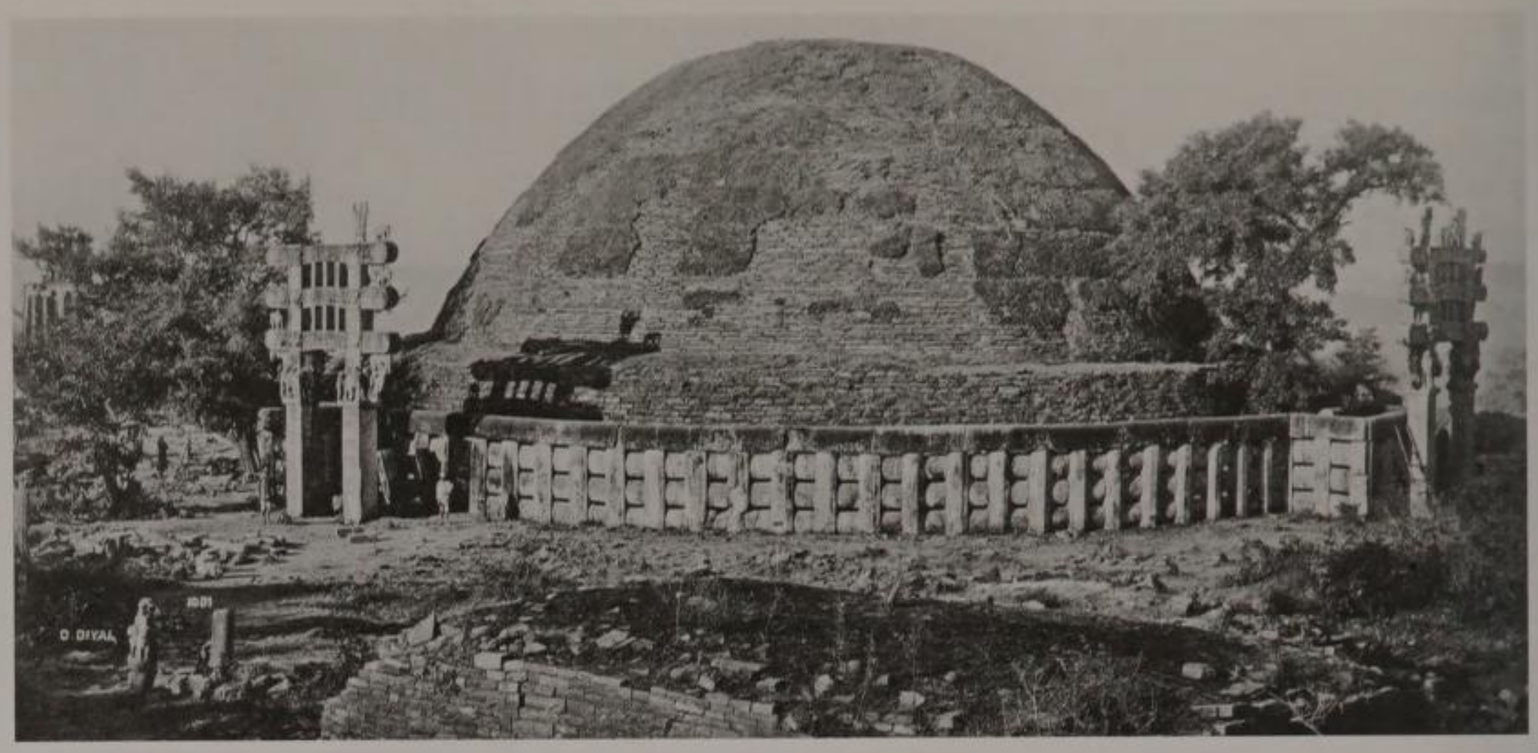
conceived as a divinity with infinite potential. He was thus associated in the early historical period with Viśvarūpa, and thence with Viṣṇu. In Vaiṣṇava theology, *Puruṣa* is invoked as the origin of the ideal man, a role assumed by Viṣṇu in Hinduism. *Puruṣa* is also associated with verticality and the pillar (*stambha*), which denotes the interconnectivity of earth and heaven, the material and the transcendent. Again, this concept resonates with Vaiṣṇava theology and Viṣṇu's supreme responsibility as the provider of stability in the universe.

Animal sacrifice was an important dimension of Vedic worship, and the persistence of the pillar symbolism into the historical era may be linked to this. A Kushan-period stone post at Mathura bears an inscription in Sanskrit associating it with the reign of Vasishka and to the performance of a specific *yajña*, a twelve-day Vedic sacrifice (*dvadashratra yajña*).[24] It has knotted ropes carved in relief on its shaft, a clear reference to those used to bind the sacrificial animal. It has also been argued that the Śiva at Gudimallam holding a club or axe in one hand and the limp body of a deer by its hind legs in the other suggests animal sacrifice (pl.39).[25] This creature persists in later images of Śiva, although as a joyfully leaping deer and explained by Śiva's role as Lord of the Wild Animals (Paśupati). Animal sacrifice remains a feature of non-Brahmanical worship to this day, seen in goddess (especially Kālī) and spirit worship in the Indian countryside (see Chapter 6 and pls.193–4).[26]

Freestanding pillars (*stambhas*) were a major element of early Jain and Buddhist *stūpa* sites. Pillars surmounted with a lion, bull or wheel were a regular feature of relief representations of Sunga, Kushan and Satavahana *stūpas*, typically flanking the offering platform or the ceremonial gateway (pl.25). This tradition owes a debt to the Parthian tradition of Iran, where the winged lion capital has an old ancestry. The bull is linked to west Asian virility cults and continues to convey such messages in Hindu India through his close association with Śiva as his sacred vehicle (*vāhana*), Nandi. The spoked wheel (*cakra*) emblem has its origins in early solar cult imagery, which can also be traced to the Persian world. It was absorbed into the Vasudeva-Viṣṇu cult of early Hinduism and linked to both early Buddhist and Jain imagery, as a symbol of the teachings (as the *dharmacakra*) and as an emblem of sovereignty (of the universal ruler or *cakravartin*). The *cakra-stambha* – the wheel symbol surmounted on a pillar – was used to embody both these concepts. They were employed only in the early period of Buddhism, as sculptural relief depictions testify at Bharhut and Sanchi, and most notably at Satavahana sites in Andhra Pradesh.[27] The legacy of this tradition is preserved today in Vaiṣṇava temples, where a *garuḍa-stambha* is an essential element of the temple scheme. Jain temples also continue the tradition of erecting memorial *stambha*, topped by an image of Brahmā

27

▶ *Stūpa* No.1, Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh. Brick *stūpa* of 3rd–2nd century BCE construction, with the sandstone gateways (*toraṇas*) a 1st century CE addition. Maurya–Sunga periods. Photograph by Lala Deen Dayal, 1880s. V&A SSEA Archive



28

▲ Rock-cut Buddhist shrine, known as the 'Lomas Ṛṣi Cave', near Bodhgaya, probably dating from the reign of Emperor Aśoka, mid-3rd century BCE. This is the among the oldest of Buddhist rock-cut shrines and it set the trend for larger scale rock-cut *caitya* halls, which was fully developed by the 1st century BCE, as seen at Kondane. The architectural form closely follows wooden prototypes; note the frieze of elephants worshipping the *stūpa*. Bihar. Mauryan period

29

▶ Reliquary recovered from the relic chamber of *Stūpa* No.2 at Sonari, south-west of Sanchi, during excavations conducted by Alexander Cunningham and F.C. Maisey in 1851. It is decorated with a frieze of parading animals. Sonari, Madhya Pradesh. 2nd century BCE. Steatite, lathe-turned and engraved. Height 16.83 cm. V&A: IM. 219–1921

(as seen at Ellora) or by four Jinas, orientated to the four directions.

Central to Vedic worship was a recited liturgy, the Vedas ('knowledge', i.e., sacred knowledge), and paramount to its practice and preservation was the oral transmission of this vast body of verse. The recitation of the *Ṛgveda*, the first of the four great Vedic books – consisting of hymns, poems and invocations – was an essential accompaniment to the performance of ritual. Other books, such as the *Samaveda*, were set to music and chanted, again during rituals. Appendices to the Vedas, known as Brahmanas, prescribed the accompanying rituals and sacrificial procedures to be followed. Those who composed the verses and enacted the rituals became known by the same name, and later as Brahmans.

These rites do not require structural temples, but rather only places to perform the rituals, preferably open ground, squared, levelled and marked out to form a sacred geometry (*yantra*), typically in stones or brick. Thus prepared, the Vedic ritual site is known as a *sthaṇḍila*, and by nature it is temporary and transient, rarely leaving any archaeological record.

Vedic knowledge is essentially concerned with the enactment of ritual. In response to the rising tide of criticism of the authority of the Brahman caste as the self-appointed keepers of ritual, led by the Buddha and Mahavīra among others, a series of treatises known as the *Upanishads* was written. Their aim was to provide a more philosophical basis for Vedic practices. They represent the final phase of Vedic thought, and in turn served to provide the philosophical foundations of Hinduism. At the centre of Brahmanical thought is the belief in *samsara*, the cycle of endless rebirths and the determining role of actions or deeds (*karma*). The fifth- and fourth-century BCE reforming sects, most notably Jainism and Buddhism, sought to provide an alternative path to liberation (*mokṣa*) and so put an end to cyclical rebirth. Their founders, Mahāvīra and the Buddha, were the most successful of many reforming thinkers of this period.[28] Both were based in the kingdom of Magadha, in modern Bihar, the most prosperous kingdom of northern India of the day. It boasted a number of substantial cities, such as Rajgir and the newly created city of Pataliputra (modern Patna).

A ritual-based faith had little need of cult images; one based on devotion did. The gradual displacement of Vedic rituals and sacrifice by forms of Brahmanical worship was accompanied by rapid developments in the evolution of temples to both receive the new deities and perform prayers and rituals to venerate them and secure their grace. Simultaneously, the newly evolving temples provided a canvas onto which a rich iconographic and narrative tradition, largely literary, could now be given visual expression. The scene was set to irreversibly link religious sculpture to the temple, integrating it into the very fabric of the building, and making it intrinsic to the temple's meaning and function.

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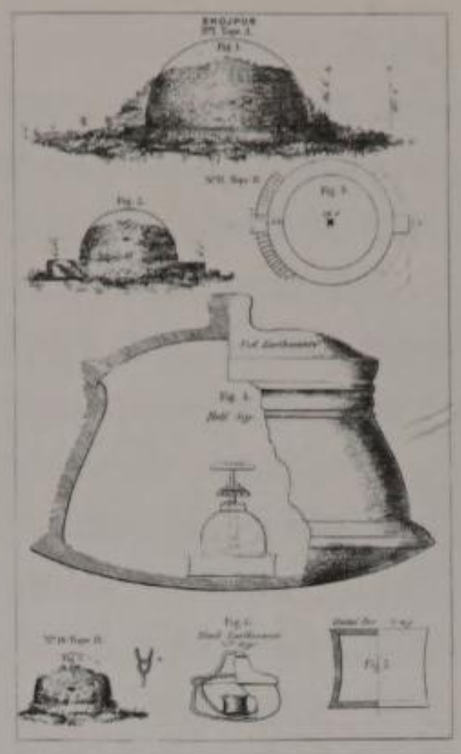
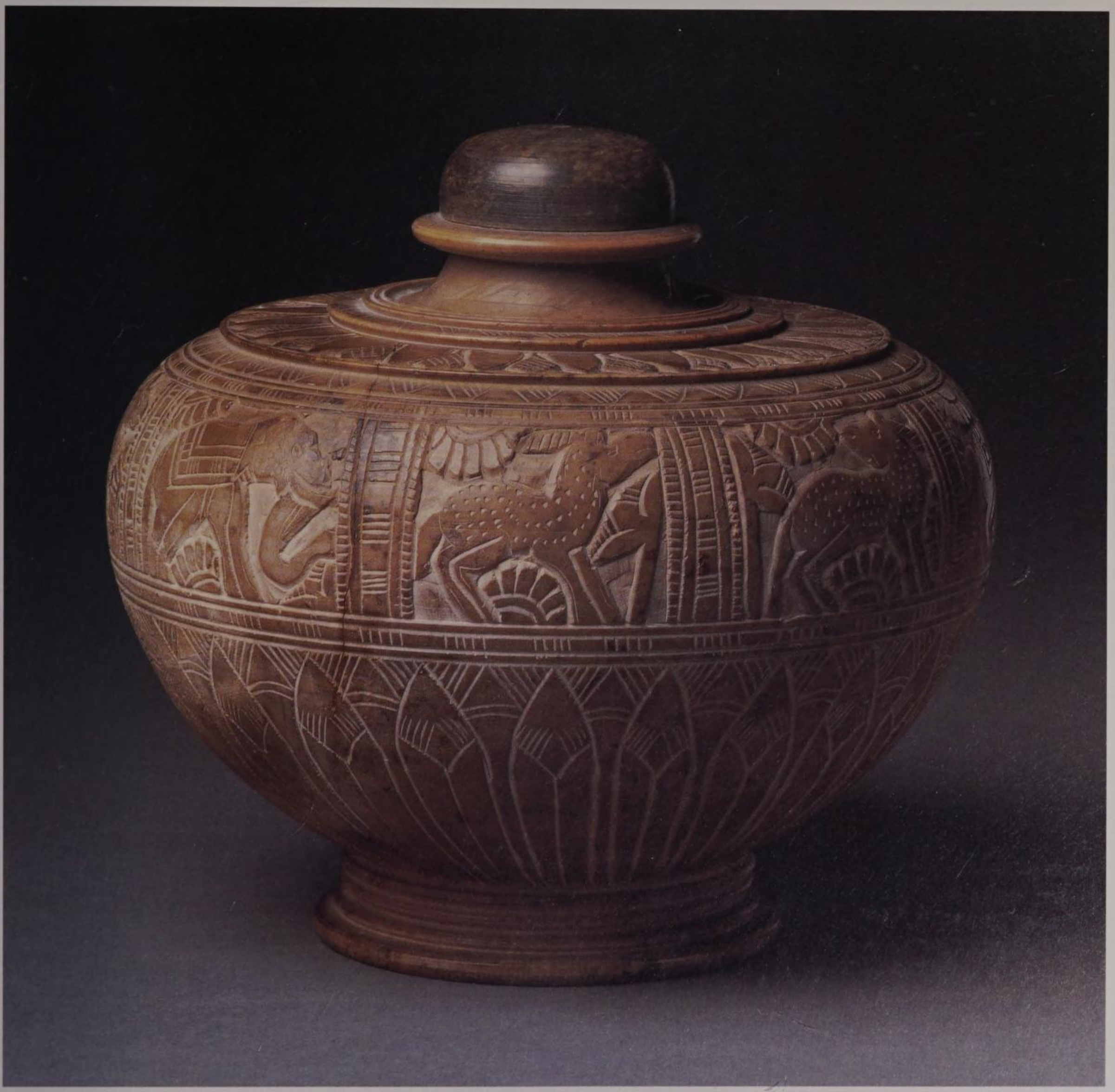
▶ Drawing of the context in which the rock-crystal *stūpa* was discovered at Bhojpur *Stūpa* No.2, Madhya Pradesh. Published A. Cunningham, *The Bhilsa Topes*, 1854



31

▶ Reliquary in the form of a *stūpa*. Recovered from an earthenware vessel deposited in the relic chamber of *Stūpa* No.2 at Bhojpur, south-east of Sanchi, during excavations conducted in 1851 by Alexander Cunningham and F.C. Maissey. Bhojpur, Madhya Pradesh. *c.*2nd century BCE. Rock crystal. Height 14.1 cm. V&A: IM.223–1921



32

▲ Moulded plaque, with Kharoshti inscription, displaying an early temple structure housing a seated ascetic, probably depicting the Buddhist shrine at Bodhgaya, the site of the Buddha's enlightenment. The disposition of the shrine tower, attending figures (*Bodhisattvas*), enclosure wall and gates, and monastic residences accords with Chinese pilgrims' descriptions of Bodhgaya. Kumrahar, Bihar. 4th–5th century, Gupta period. Terracotta. Height 10.6 cm. Patna Museum

33

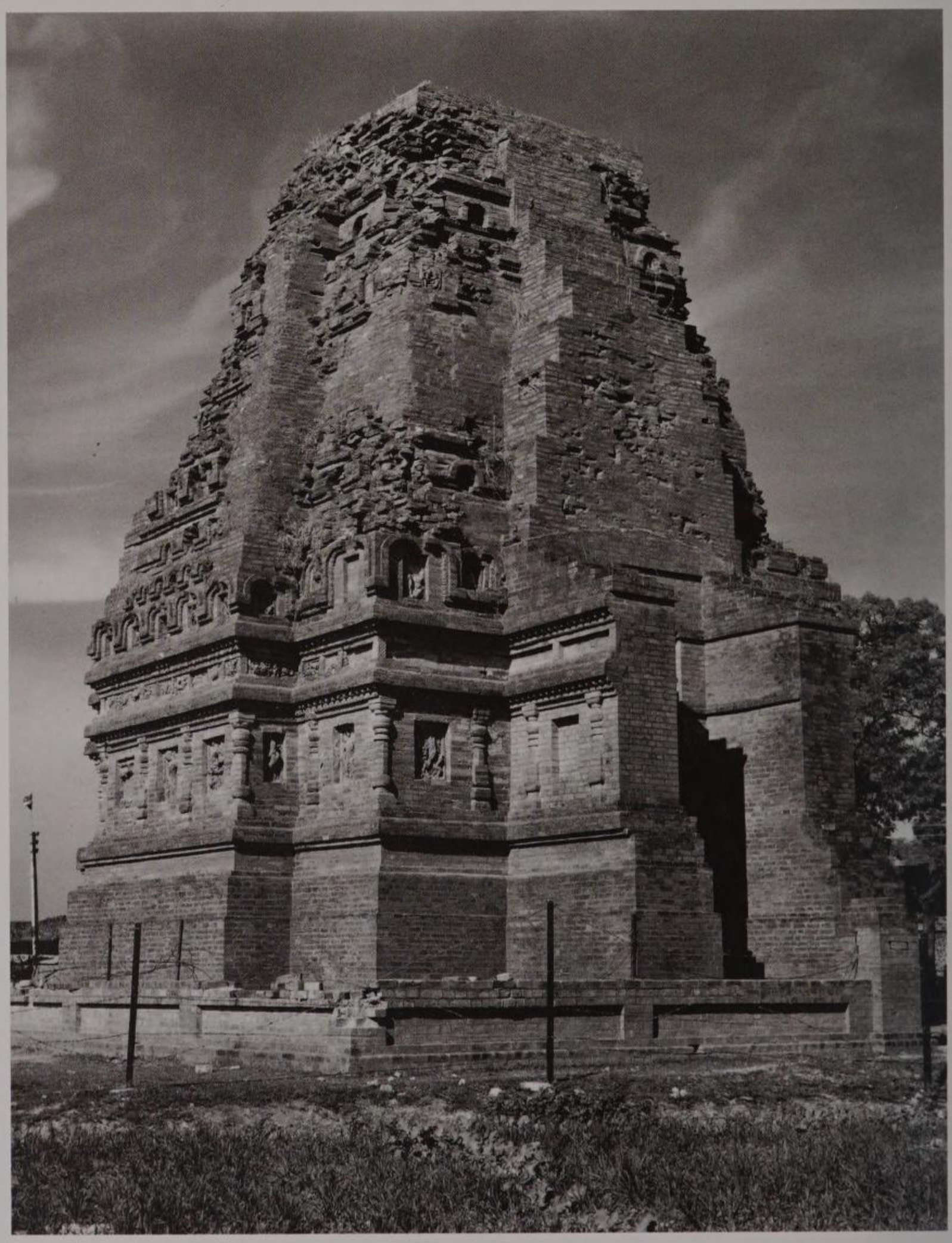
▶ Bhitargaon temple, Uttar Pradesh. Late 5th century, Gupta period. American Institute of Indian Studies

Myths made manifest

The manifestations of the deities in their many varied forms were designed, on one level, to facilitate the telling of the great creation myths and legends that form India's greatest inheritance, the ancient cosmologies. These narratives served to explain the universe, its chaos and its order, and to offer a path to understanding the unfathomable. This corpus of wisdom, knowledge and faith is embodied principally in the Vedas, the Purāṇas and the Epics.

The Vedas claim the highest level of divine authority, which is greater than any individual god. A number of Brahmanical divinities trace their ancestry to descriptions in the Vedas, including Śiva as Rudra, and Viṣṇu, then a minor deity, outshone by a god called Kṛṣṇa. Indra and Brahmā towered over the lesser gods.

The Purāṇas are legendary accounts of ancient times, largely concerned with the adventures and deeds of the gods and their dynastic genealogies, and in effect they illuminate many aspects of ancient Indian history. They have been characterized as the 'Vedas for the populace', as they present complex metaphysical notions through myth, legend and story telling. They serve as commentaries on the Vedas and embody generations of Indian philosophy,



revealing to a popular audience the myriad forms of deities named in the Vedas, and giving them life through myth. They take the form of traditional history, and so also complement the third genre of religious literature, the Epics, which might be termed allegorical history.

The Epic literature provides the mythological framework for the Indian world cosmology and is expressed principally in the Hindu *Mahābhārata*, its subsidiary text, the *Bhāgavata Gītā*, and the *Rāmāyaṇa*. The *Jātakas*, the stories of the Buddha's previous lives or incarnations, provide the nearest equivalent in the Buddhist context, as do aspects of the Jain *Kalpasūtra*, which provide hagiographic accounts of the Jinas, but both lack the sheer scale and vision of the Brahmanical literature. Finally there are the *Upanishads*, which represent a vast commentary literature that nonetheless embodies many important philosophical innovations within it, and provides the philosophical foundations of Hinduism. Many of the metaphysical complexities that Indian temple sculpture was struggling to give material expression to were contained in the *Upanishads*. Embodying these successive corpuses of literature, Hinduism is arguably the oldest practised religion known, being traceable to around 1200 BCE.

Many of the gods named in the Vedas were to assume a role in Hinduism, but very often the hierarchies shifted so that not all gods of importance in the Vedic era retained their status in later periods. Indra, who presided over the other gods in the Vedic pantheon, was one of the gods whose status was diminished; he retained his association with rain and storms, symbolized by his thunderbolt weapon (*vajra*), but Viṣṇu usurped his role as supreme defender of order and vanquisher of demons. Brahmā, the anthropomorphic form of the great Vedic creator god, saw his powers as the supreme god appropriated, in part by Viṣṇu taking over his creative role and Śiva usurping his powers of destruction. Other gods were reinvented or otherwise metamorphosed into a different form, as witnessed by Vasudeva, who was absorbed into the cult of Viṣṇu.

It is Viṣṇu's ascendant status that is being celebrated in the two great epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* (as Rāma), and in the supplementary *Harivaṁśa* (as Kṛṣṇa). This epic literature provided the mythological framework for much of the Indian world cosmology. Similarly, Śiva makes his first appearance in the *Ṛgveda*, as Rudra 'the howler', an inauspicious outsider associated with the destructive forces of nature. Only when appropriately propitiated does he show his gentler nature, when he is called Śiva, the 'auspicious one'. The complex and contradictory aspects of Śiva's personality, explored in his many manifestations as both a gracious lord and a fearsome warrior, are present from the earliest sculptural representations.

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▶ **Viṣṇu sleeping on the coils of the world serpent Sesa (Ananta), with Brahmā being born on a lotus stem from his navel. Viṣṇu wears a classic Gupta-style tripartite garlanded crown with central medallion. Bhitargaon temple, Uttar Pradesh. Late 5th century, Gupta period. V&A SSEA Archive**

35

◀ Head of woman, from an architectural relief panel. An elegantly modelled head of a woman of high status, wearing a faceted head ornament (*tikka*) in the centre parting, large elliptical ear-plugs (*kuṇḍala*) with inset pendant pearls, and a continuous line eyebrow ('like a bow'), characteristics of the mature Gupta style. North India, probably Uttar Pradesh. Terracotta. Height 26.7 cm. V&A: IS.45–1988

36

▼ Roundel with a woman and antelope design. From an architectural relief panel. North India, probably Uttar Pradesh. 5th century, Gupta period. Terracotta. Height 20.5 cm. V&A: IS.121–1999. Bequest of Alexander Biancardi

By around the Sunga era (187–75 BCE) developments were taking place that were to alter irreversibly the way in which worship was understood. Vedic ritual sacrifice was gradually being displaced by Brahmanical modes of devotional worship. A natural and inevitable consequence of this was a growing demand for images upon which to focus that devotion. A sculptural tradition that had learnt its skills in the production of animistic cult images quickly gave form to the multiplicity of gods first evoked in Vedic verse. The result was an outburst of artistic production, characterized by experimentation, as witnessed under the Sunga and succeeding Kushan dynasties in north India, and by such extraordinary early achievements as that of the Satavahana-period artist of the Śiva *liṅga* at Gudimallam, near Tirupati in southern Andhra Pradesh (pl.39). This sculpture, which is most probably datable to the end of the first century BCE, or even the beginning of the first century CE,[29] stands as a landmark in the evolution of Śiva cult images, combining for the first time the aniconic and anthropomorphic forms. Śiva is venerated in his phallic (*liṅga*) form, rendered with a startling degree of naturalism, addorsed with the anthropomorphic figure of Rudra-Śiva, the wild god of the forests, perhaps already identifiable by the club he holds as Śiva Lakulīśa ('Lord with the Club'). The full anthropomorphic figure addorsed to a *liṅga* did not persist beyond the Kushan-Satavahana periods, but its concept did, in the form of the *liṅga* with the addorsed face/s of Śiva, the *ekamukhaliṅga* (one-faced *liṅga*) and the *caturmukhaliṅga* (four-five faced). The *ekamukhaliṅga* became a favoured form in the Gupta period (pl.157).

The Gudimallam Śiva is standing astride the shoulders of a grotesque deformed figure, emblematic of the nature cults the new faith was displacing (pl.39). This debased figure forecasts the dwarf figures trampled by Śiva in later iconographic manifestations, most notably that of Naṭarāja trampling Apasmāra (pl.114). Many of the nature-spirit deities assumed respectable if lesser roles in the Brahmanical pantheon, among whom Kubera was a notably successful *yakśa* (pl.41). Excavations below the sanctuary floor at Gudimallam revealed the remains of a stone railing that originally enclosed the *liṅga*, probably outdoors or within a wooden shrine. The apsidal shrine housing it today dates from the seventh–eighth-century Pallava period; it is itself enveloped in a later structure, the Cola temple Parashurameshvara. This anthropomorphic *liṅga* is possibly the oldest cult image in the Indian subcontinent to have been under continuous worship without interruption for over 2,000 years. It embodies the radical transition that was taking place in Indian religious practice, in which the sacrificial post assumed a fresh identity and meaning as the erect phallus of Śiva, addorsed with the ascendant god

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▶ Seal showing a male figure with 'bull-horn' headdress standing between trees, a bull, a shrine with a sacrificial post and an altar with a vessel. Rubbing from a seal from Mohenjo Daro, Pakistan. 2100–1740 BCE, Harappan period. V&A SSEA Archive

in human form, suppressing a demi-god of the old faith beneath his feet. It is a supreme statement of superiority and subjugation.

In the centuries immediately preceding the first millennium CE, these ritual practices of worship were codified into a prescriptive literature, intended to guide both the Brahmans and the laity in the correct rituals of worship. They occur in the Śaiva *āgama* texts and their Vaiṣṇava and *śākta* equivalents, the *saṁhitās* and the *tantras*. These liturgical guides describe the procedures to be followed for performing acts of worship, including the worship of images of deities (*ārādhana*). They also have their equivalents in the Buddhist and Jain canons – perhaps the first to have developed forms of worship through the medium of images, employed in the veneration of *stūpas*.

The conversion of prayers and other religious formulae to written texts, and the production of sculptural images of the deities described in those texts, seemed to collide in this period or shortly after. The reverence with which religious texts were regarded is well attested, and the palm-leaf manuscript, the vehicle for sacred knowledge, came to be an object of veneration in its own right. This was especially the case for the reforming sects of Jainism and Buddhism, both of which saw their sacred knowledge under threat from natural calamities (a famine once threatened the original Jain community in eastern India) and internal theological divisions. Sacred teachings and knowledge were committed to birch-bark and palm-leaf books. Over time, specific deities were associated with sacred knowledge, such as Sarasvatī for the Jains and a Mahāyānist goddess, Prajñāpāramitā, was created as the embodiment of the essence of the text of the same name (pl.134).

Among the early sculptural repertoire of deities to appear in Kushan Mathura is a sandstone sculpture of the goddess Sarasvatī, bearing a Brahmi inscription recording that it was donated in the 'year 54' of the Kanishka era, most probably equivalent to CE 181 (pl.43).[30] Revered by Hindus, Jains and Buddhists alike, Sarasvatī has as part of her attributes a palm-leaf manuscript, underscoring the power of the sacred word. This is the earliest representation of a palm-leaf manuscript (*pustaka*) in Indian art, and it serves to confirm that written texts were now in production alongside the tradition of oral transmission so vital to the preservation of religious knowledge. This is also the first recorded representation of the goddess, and it was found in a Jain context at Mathura.

As further excavations are undertaken in northern India and more collections are studied and published, it is becoming clear that the bulk of the standard iconographic programmes of the Indian religions was being developed by the first century BCE and was largely in place by the early centuries of the first millennium CE. While large cult images were produced, the greater number of these images

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▶ Nandikeśvara, a double-sided horned figure of Nandi, Śiva's most devout servant, in anthropomorphic form. Nandikeśvara's posture, with folded arms, is that of a devotee rather than a weapon-wielding gatekeeper. Tamilnadu. 11th century, Cola period. Granite. Height 1.60 m. V&A: IS.11–1978

39

◀ Śiva *liṅga* in situ, Parasuramesvara temple, Gudimallam. In this unique survivor of early anthropomorphic representations of the Śaiva *liṅga*, Śiva is holding a spear, a club and a slain deer, suggesting an identification with Kirata, the divine hunter, and with Śiva Lakuliśa, 'Lord with the club'. He tramples a *gaṇa* beneath his feet, emblematic of the triumph of the new religion over the ancient cults. Gudimallam, Andhra Pradesh. *c.*1st century BCE, Satavahana period. Stone. Height 1.25 m. American Institute of Indian Studies

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▼ Seated *yakśa*. The function of such small icons is unclear, although they may have served as devotional tools for appeasing the spirits of the natural world. Chandraketugarh region, Bengal. 1st century BCE–1st century CE. Clay. Height 12.8 cm. V&A: IS.133–1999

consists of small-scale sandstone sculptures, typically less than thirty centimetres tall. Small devotional images are a prime source for the study of innovations in early Indian iconography, for they often embody the earliest evidence of new religious innovations. Their modest scale suggests that such sculptural images were installed in small shrines, which were probably communal. Their placement in the village may well have echoed the manner in which animistic cult images were installed for veneration; certainly the earliest Brahmanical images directly mimic the *yakśa* cult images of the period. This relationship is well illustrated by a second-century warrior figure of the Kushan school (pl.42) and a slightly later sculpture of Viṣṇu from the same region of north India (pl.166). Both are represented as martial figures, of robust physique and with their feet placed firmly astride. The warrior figure, close in style to sculptures of *yakśas*, carries a large club (*gadā*) and most probably represents Vasudeva. A Viṣṇu figure close in date to the Vasudeva already exhibits superhuman attributes – four arms intended to display the club, conch, discus and symbolic gesture (*mudrā*). Viṣṇu's tripartite crown surmounted with a sun symbol and the nimbus bearing fluttering ribbons, both point to his west Asian solar cult ancestry. In a number of examples, a lion face – again a sun symbol – is carved in the front of the tiara, as seen at Udayagiri Cave 6 and in a number of Gupta-period Viṣṇus.[31] The combining of Vedic concepts with west Asian attributes superimposed onto indigenous *yakśa* cult imagery proved to be a potent synthesis. A series of important Brahmanical images was generated through this process, notably those of Viṣṇu, Sūrya, Indra and forms of Devī. In the Buddhist arena Vajrapāni is the most obvious product of this evolution.[32]

The earliest Brahmanical goddess cult to emerge remains the most popular to this day. The first evidence of an independent goddess cult is preserved in the *Śrī Sūkta* ('Hymn to Śrī'), a late addition to the *Ṛgveda*, perhaps dating from around 500 BCE. In these prayers her dual role is already acknowledged, as Viṣṇu's wife, and as the giver of gifts, residing on a lotus flower. Śrī is the 'boon giver' par excellence, from whom golden coins can rain down on the most worthy of devotees. Legends abound of her munificence, and it is therefore hardly surprising that she has been a favourite subject for depiction in sculptural form. Terracotta sculptures of Śrī began appearing in around the third century BCE, and by the fourth century CE she had won a place of honour (appropriately) on Gupta coins and seals (pl.181). Independent shrines to Śrī within Viṣṇu temple complexes probably began appearing around this time, although none survives from before the tenth century.

The most dramatic expression of the goddess cult was the early appearance of the *Devī* as the awesome slayer of the buffalo demon Mahiṣa. The origin myth of the goddess Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī is told in an abridged version in the *Skanda Purāṇa*, which could date to the sixth or seventh century, and is then recounted in its fullest version in the *Devī Mahatmya* ('Glorification of the Great Goddess') text, which is contained in the *Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇa*, probably composed in the early eighth century.[33] The *Devī Mahatmya* grew in importance, and today it forms a part of the daily liturgy at Durgā temples and is central to the performance of the annual Durgā Pūjā festival in Bengal. In it, Durgā's role as the slayer of the great demon Mahiṣa is recounted in glorious and gruesome detail. Acknowledged as the only deity capable of destroying this demonic threat to world order, Durgā is lent weapons by the male gods – hence her representation with a multitude of arms bearing their weapons. She is variously represented with four, eight and sometimes twelve arms; an early terracotta form shows her with four (pl.178). The popularity of this cult in major sculptural programmes is a clear indication of the importance of the cult of the goddess from the earliest

times, as seen at Udayagiri Cave 6, dated by inscription to 401 (pl.165). This form of the goddess, which appeared as early as the first century CE in Mathura, may have evolved out of earlier and now forgotten goddess cults, in which the heavily bejewelled figure displayed an array of hairpins surmounted with 'weapons' in her coiffure, as a number of north Indian terracottas and a rare miniature bronze image attest.[34]

A distinctive feature of early Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava art is the absence of interest in narrative, be it in heroic exploits or in legends. This is a curious phenomenon, considering the wealth of literary sources for imagery in the Epic and Purāṇic literature. It is only from the Gupta period onwards that temples include narrative reliefs illustrating the Epics (*Mahābhārata*, *Rāmāyaṇa*) or the *Kṛṣṇalila* drawn from the *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*. These constituted an important part of the iconographic ornamentation of monuments in the post-Gupta and medieval periods, especially at Ellora and Pattadakal in Maharasthra, and at Hoysala temples in Karnataka. This stands in sharp contrast to the activities of the early

41

▶ Kubera, a *yakśa* elevated to the god of riches and treasure. This guardian of wealth had already acquired a minor cult status by the Gupta period. Although 'ill-shaped' (one reading of his name), he is now benign; compare him with the grimacing *yakśa* beneath Śiva's feet on the Gudimallam *liṅga* (pl.39). Reportedly from Kaman, near Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. 5th–6th century, Gupta period. Sandstone. Height 22.5 cm. V&A: IM.322–1921. Given by D.A. Weinholt

42

▶ Vāsudeva-Viṣṇu. This robust figure, crowned and carrying a large club, gesturing protection to his devotees, may be identified as Vāsudeva, from whom the Viṣṇu cult figure evolves. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. 2nd century, Kushan period. Sandstone. Height 23.49 cm. V&A: IM.76–1927

43

▼ Goddess Sarasvatī, depicted holding a palm-leaf manuscript. Dated by inscription to year 54 of Saka era, equivalent to CE 181. Excavated at Kankali Tila, a predominantly Jain site at Mathura. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. Red sandstone. Height 57 cm. State Museum, Lucknow. American Institute of Indian Studies

Buddhists, whose teachings stressed the pursuit of moral behaviour based on a spiritual role model. Hence we see much early Buddhist art, as witnessed in Bharhut, Sanchi and Bodhgaya, essentially concerned with story telling of both the life of the historical Buddha Śākyamuni, and the stories of the Buddha's previous existences, the *Jātakas* (pl.25). This narrative orientation was to a degree shared by the Jains, whose lives of the previous Jinas (*tīrthaṇkaras*) can be seen as analogous to the Buddhist *Jātaka* stories. Both serve to establish a lineage for their teachings stretching back beyond the historical period.

So emerged a complex and potentially expanding pantheon of deities, conceived as visualization of facets of the divine nature. Out of the flux that characterized early representations of deities in the Sunga, Kushan and Gupta periods, a new orthodoxy emerged, linked to the rising authority of the temple. The most direct expression of the bringing together of artistic activity and religious practice is to be found in the integration of the temple and its sculpture into a single vision. In these structures we witness a unity of cosmic symbolism, sacred geometry and didactic iconographic programmes, all of an immense complexity and sophistication. Along with this came the codification of how deities were to be represented, marking the standardization of image making in Indian art, both in their iconographic programme and in their formal composition. The rules that gave form to Indian temple sculpture are explored in Chapter 2.

2

The Rules of Design: the *Śāstric* Tradition

The divinity draws near willingly if images are beautiful.
Viṣṇudharmottara[1]

Indian traditional arts, by which we largely mean arts in the service of religion, have been shaped and directed by a body of knowledge known as the *śilpaśāstras* (arts/craft rule books or manuals). These are rules, guidelines and directives pertaining to the arts, including architecture, painting and sculpture. *Śāstric* texts exist on all forms of creative activity and have served over the past 1,500 years to give artists, architects and performers of the dramatic arts a degree of guidance, both technical and aesthetic. *Śāstras* are regarded as revealed knowledge, manifestations of divine power that draw their ultimate authority from the Vedas.[2] Those who practise these creative arts, including those responsible for the making of icons, are known as *śilpi* or *sthapati*.[3] The *śāstric* rules pertaining to sculpture are embodied in texts primarily concerned with painting – both art forms are concerned with the 'raising up' of an image by creating the illusion of a physical presence (pl.44). Painting was seen as the more demanding art, requiring the artist to conjure up an illusion using optical and chromatic devices (pl.46). Furthermore, painting was used to enhance sculpture, to add to the fidelity of an image. Both sculpture and painting are understood to exist in an architectural context, although painting spans both the religious and the secular worlds, being as much a part of palace interiors as those of temples and shrines.

Artisans were organized into craft guilds (*sreni*) in early India.[4] In the late Vedic literature, crafts and professions are carefully graded and may be linked to an emerging caste system. Early on many of the crafts organized themselves into guilds – corporate bodies to protect their shared interests.[5] Membership was hereditary, as were the skills that were transmitted only to those within the guild system and fiercely guarded against outsiders. Over time the guilds amassed considerable wealth and, on occasion, acted as patrons of shrines and religious images. Inscriptions record that they were involved in religious giving (*dana*) from an early period. The gifts were made to both accrue religious benefit (*puṇya*) from the deity honoured, and to enhance the guilds' social standing. Numerous inscriptions record the benevolence of many of the guilds, which ranged from the care of their members and their families to the patronage of temples.
On occasions, sculptures were dedicated by guilds. The earliest direct evidence of the activities of craft guilds in India is contained in an inscription on a late-Mauryan-period sculpture of the second century BCE, found at Parkham, near Mathura (pl.7). The Brahmi-script inscription declares that it was made 'in the guild of (Mani)bhadra...by Gomitaka, a pupil of Kunika'.[6] Clearly there was a well-established guild system of master teachers and apprentices in operation in this early period, ensuring the transmission of knowledge and skills within these discrete social groups.

44
◀ Interior of rock-cut *vihāra* and image house with mural painting. Ajanta, Cave 2, Maharastra. Late 5th century, Vakataka period. Photograph © Thomas Dix

45

▶ Buddha offering protection. The physiognomy of this Buddha image follows two sets of conventions: the *śāstric* prescriptions regarding proportioning and measurements, and the specifically Buddhist requirements for auspicious markings (*lakṣaṇas*), such as the skull protuberance, extended earlobes and webbed fingers, given emphasis by their scale.
Late 6th–7th century, Post-Gupta style.
Copper alloy. Height 35.5 cm. V&A: IS.3–2004 / BM: OA 2004.4-1.1

The confirmed existence of stone-carving guilds in around the second century BCE demonstrates the high level of craft activity that was undertaken in early India, linked to a rising level of urbanization and prosperity generated through long-distance trade. Much of this patronage came from merchants. A study of the location of *yakśa* images in and around Mathura has established that they follow closely the known early trade roads.[7] This further strengthens the relationship indicated by the limited number of early inscriptions that there was a clear link between the merchant community and the commissioning of images. Along with the merchant community, urban craft guilds were particularly involved in the support of Buddhist monasteries and their associated *stūpas* and *caitya* halls. The Buddhist complex at Sanchi is rich in donor inscriptions, predominantly carved on the stonework enclosure posts, medallions and gateways. It is revealing that this patronage comes from neither royal nor political sources, but from large numbers

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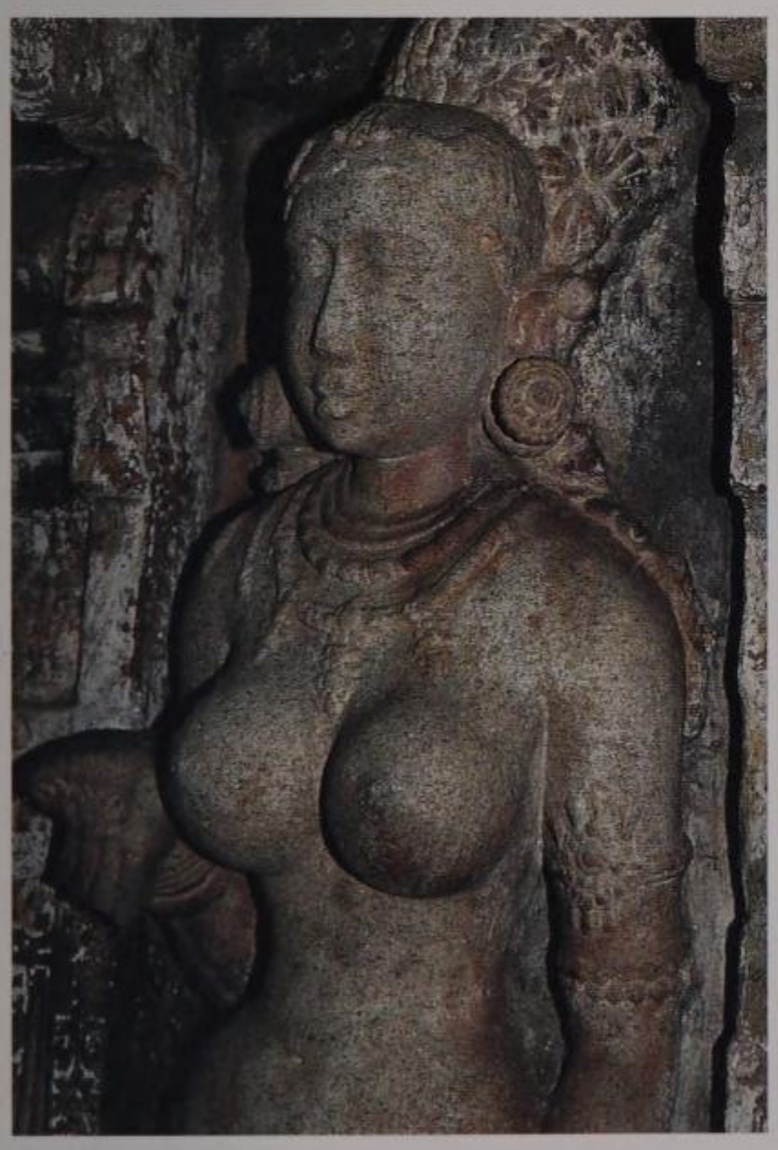
▶ Ceiling mural detail showing perspective rendering of key-fret design. Ajanta, Cave 2, Room 24, Maharastra. Late 5th century, Vakataka period. Photograph by the author, 1981

47

▼ Portrait of a Cola queen, Nageśvara temple, Kumbakonam, Tamilnadu. This masterpiece of early Cola sculpture embodies the *śāstric* ideals of feminine beauty. The wall niches of the sanctuary of this temple contain superlative sculptures of deities, *riṣis* and donors. This temple is unique in giving such prominence to patrons in Cola architecture. Dedicated around 886 under the patronage of the Cola king Aditya I (871–907), early Cola period. Photograph by the author, 2003



of individuals. Many may have been merchants, the wealthiest segment of the community to actively support Buddhism.

However, the inscriptions also make it clear that a significant number of the patrons of Buddhist sites were not lay devotees, but members of the monastic orders. Studies of donor inscriptions by Gregory Schopen at both Bharhut and Sanchi *stūpa* sites have revealed that some 40 per cent of all recorded patronage at these sites was funded by monks and nuns, many of them senior members of the monastic communities (*saṅgha*), and this pattern is broadly repeated at other sites. At Mathura, for example, over 50 per cent of the donors were monastic, and again, judging by their religious titles, a significant number of these held high office as transmitters of Buddhist doctrine (*bhanakas*). These high-ranking monks and nuns completely predominate when we examine the earliest inscribed Buddha images: all the earliest images were established by monks and nuns.[8] The grandest example to survive is the 2.48 metre-high standing Buddha donated in the third year of the Kaniska era (130 CE) by the monk 'Bala' (pl.11).

Sculpture and the *śāstras*

The fifth-century Gupta poet Kalidasa wrote of the skills of connoisseurship necessary to recognize the qualities achieved by observance of the *śāstric* rules in the making of art.[9] These led directly to experiencing the appropriate aesthetic pleasures. Religious art, however, had a higher objective: to create an icon or image of an aesthetic standard that would please the god himself. In order to achieve this, guidance was provided through the *śāstras*. These directives were of a very general nature: they were broad guidelines that assumed a considerable level of knowledge and proficiency on the part of the practitioner. While some aspects of the creative process, such as the use of foreshortening and perspective devices, were prescribed in some detail, much was left unstated, assumed no doubt to be part of the hereditary knowledge of trained craftspeople. This transmission of skill knowledge was the responsibility of the guild system. *Śāstras* were rules for the initiated and would have been largely unfathomable to the novice, and therefore only of use to those already inducted in the guild system.

The *śilpaśāstras* or art manuals are contained principally in two texts, the *Citralakṣaṇa* and the *Citrasūtra* section of the *Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa*.[10] The latter is a formal exposition on the canons and classifications of art, primarily focusing on painting and itself a supplement to the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, currently

assigned to the fifth century CE.[11] The *Citrasūtra* is the fullest exposition of the nature of artistic expression and its powers of communication. These are texts of Indian aesthetic theory, and they are prescriptive in the sense that they describe the technical structure underpinning figurative representation in Indian arts.[12] They are explicit about the physical aspects of image-making, describing the system of measurements (*tāla*) and proportions (*mana*), the relationships of parts (iconometry) and the visual language of attributes, poses and gesture (iconography). However, the texts can rarely be used as strict references to the visual images: discrepancies are the norm, with the texts appearing to illustrate an aspirational ideal and not the daily practice of image-making. Nonetheless, the texts provide the standard against which to measure and define 'beauty'. The central message of this system is conveyed in the *Viṣṇudharmottara* through the medium of a dialogue between the sage Mārkaṇḍeya and King Vajra. Mārkaṇḍeya states:

> When you gain from me the knowledge of the nature of the measurements and the characteristic attributes, the proportions and the forms, the ornamentation and the beauties, then you will be fully versed in all the skills and become a universally known and masterly expert in the art of sculpture.[13]

This catalogue of artist's skills underpins the hymns of praise written by Kalidasa in honour of the goddess Pārvatī, in which the poet employs the artist's devices as a tool for defining beauty: 'Her body modelled by youth appeared as it were a red lotus in full bloom and as modelled figure with contour line.'[14] (pl.48).

Interestingly, neither the *Viṣṇudharmottara* nor the other *śilpaśāstra* texts are explicit about the metaphysical symbolism that underpins these carefully defined forms. It is as if the iconography and the iconometry belonged to another class of knowledge, or were simply taken as given, part of the shared cultural language of the age. The written sources are emphatic about the interdependence of artistic activities in early India. This is not confined to the visual arts, but extends to the performing dramatic arts (pl.49), for which the *Nāṭyaśāstra* provides the guiding text. A meaningful interdependence between the visual and performing arts is clearly demonstrated from the outset in these texts. The *Viṣṇudharmottara*, building on the earlier treatise manual of the dramatic arts, provides clear instructions for the artist in creating visual representations, expressly stating that the rules of painting also refer to images made of metal, stone and wood and to clay modelling.[15]

A special place is reserved for the role of the art of dance in this scheme. Indeed, the texts insist that the painter or sculptor cannot begin to realize his goal without first mastering the expressive language embodied in dance, music and

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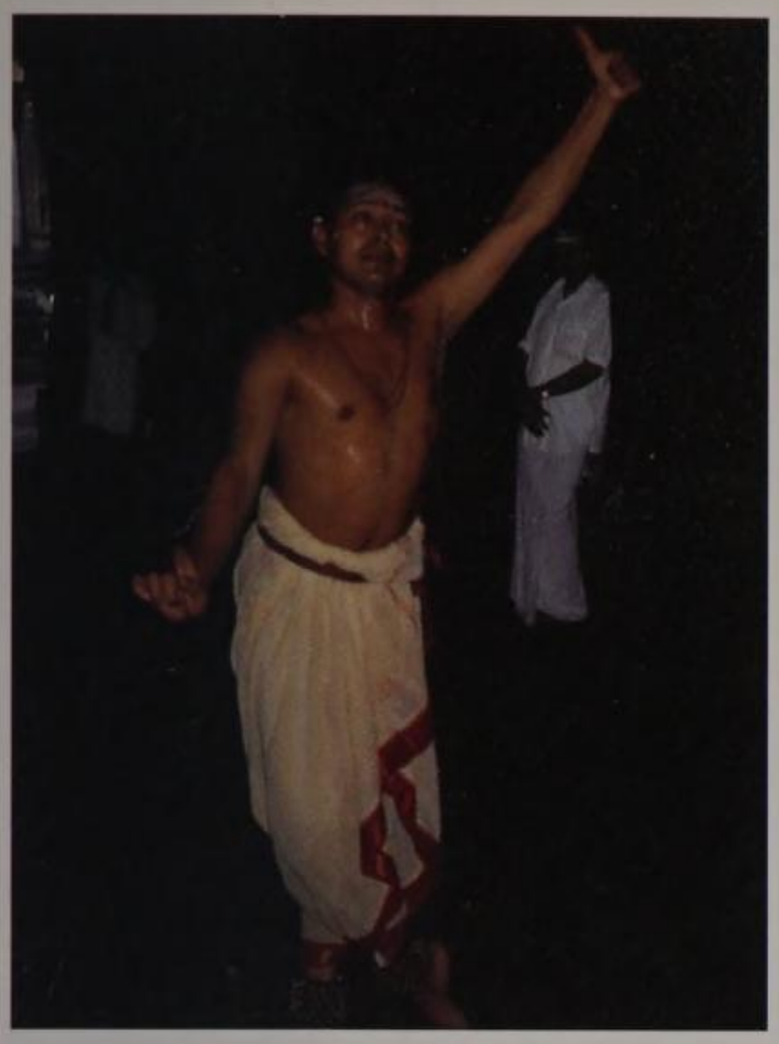
▶ Seated Mahaśrī Tara. Illustrated palm-leaf folio from an *Aṣṭasahaśrikaprajñāpāramitā* manuscript; from the Vredenburg Manuscript. According to the colophon, this manuscript was donated by a lay devotee, Udaya Sinha, in the 36th year of the reign of the Pala king Ramapala, *c.*1120; probably Nalanda monastery, Bihar, Pala period. Gouache and ink on palm-leaf. Folio 6.5 x 52.5 cm. V&A: IS.8–1958



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▲ Dancer celebrating Lord Śiva at the sanctuary of the Chit Sabha, Chidambaram temple, Tamilnadu. The dancer's pose evokes Śiva as Kirāta, the great hunter. Photograph by the author, 2002

the vocal arts. In response to King Vajra requesting instruction from Mārkaṇḍeya in the art of icon making, so that he can ensure that he is worshipping his gods in their correct sculptural form, the sage replies:

> One cannot understand the principles of image making without a knowledge of painting. The king wishes for instruction in this art and is told that, unless he is accomplished as a dancer, he cannot grasp even the rudiments of painting. The king requests that he be taught dancing, whereupon the sage replies that, without a keen sense of rhythm or a knowledge of instrumental music, proficiency in dance is impossible. Once again the king requests that he be taught these subjects; to which the sage replies that a mastery of vocal music is necessary before one can be proficient in instrumental music; and so finally the sage takes the king through all these stages before he is taught the art of iconography.[16]

The interdependence of the arts is still clearly understood by craftsmen today. The founder of the traditional stone-sculpture workshops 're-established' at Mamallapuram by the government of Tamilnadu in 1955 was a traditional architect (*sthapati*) descended from a family of *sthapati* who traced their lineage back to the architect responsible for the building of the Brhadesvara temple at Tanjavur, constructed under the patronage and close eye of the Cola king Rajaraja. The son of the institute's founder, Śrī Gaṇapati Sthapati, explained in an interview in 1982 that his father 'taught him how to carve forms through learning how to draw them'.[17] Forms are 'drawn' onto the block of stone in charcoal and red earth pigment, and as the drawing disappears beneath the chisel so a fresh drawing is added, to be again removed, and so on, progressively revealing the sculptural form (pl.50). The sculptor works with a range of chisels, from coarse to fine, which allow him to progress to the finished state.

In a further passage, the interdependence of the visual and performing arts is made even more explicit:

> Without the knowledge of the art of dancing, the rules of *citra* [visual arts] are very difficult to understand... dancing the imitation of the three worlds [i.e. all things] is enjoined in tradition. The eyes and their expressions, the limbs and their parts all over and the hands have to be treated (oh) best of kings, as... in dance. They should be the same in *citra*.[18]

This intimate relationship between the arts of dance and image-making is fundamental to an understanding of form and movement in Indian arts. Dance is the ascendant art form: it takes precedent, setting the measure for other media to follow. As has been argued by Kapila Vatsyayan in her magisterial *The Square and the Circle of the Indian Arts*, it is most probable that the seeds of the codification of the arts of painting and sculpture are embedded in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, the *śāstra* for the dramatic arts.[19] Certainly the conventions of posture, gesture and movement that were established for dramatic stage arts, especially dance, underpin much of the visual vocabulary of painting and sculpture. Like all prescriptive texts, they must have originally *followed* rather than led practice; that is, they began by describing the established practice of the day. If this is so, then the language and conventions of dance must have been formulated before those of painting or sculpture. As we have some basis for dating the *Viṣṇudharmottara* to perhaps as early as the fifth century, this sets a terminus before which the codification of dance in some form must date. It has been argued, notably through references to dance in the *Silappadikaram*, that the *Nāṭyaśāstra* may have been written in its present form as early as the third century CE.[20] Over time, the *śāstras* were undoubtedly supplemented by oral knowledge and the experience of practitioners, so that they came to both reflect current practice and direct it. The *śilpaśāstras* were sustained and renewed through this experience.

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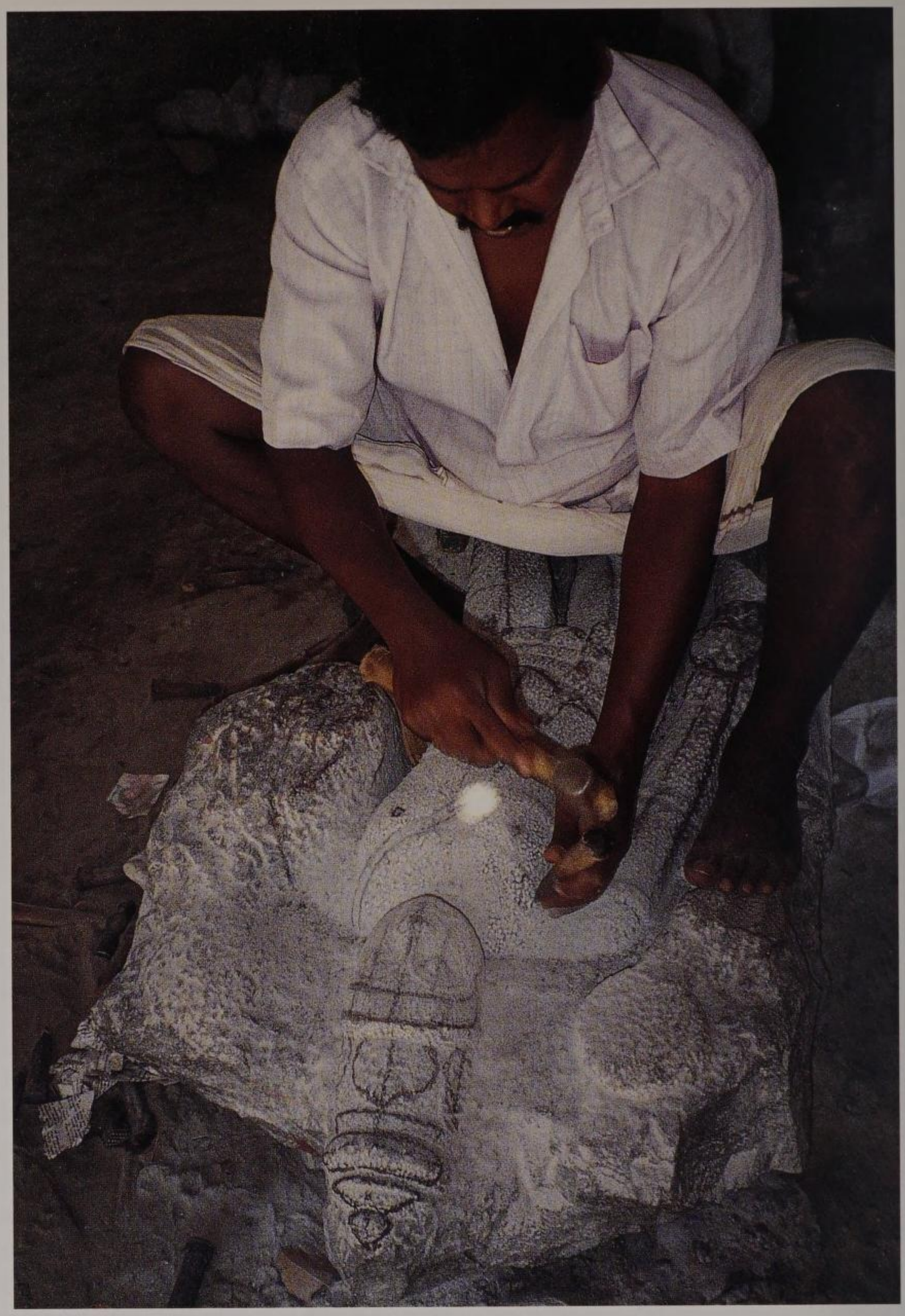
▶ A master stone sculptor (*sthapati*) working on a granite image of Viṣṇu, Mamallapuram, Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, 1995



The interdependence of dance and the visual arts is made explicit in the earliest Indian sources on these subjects. Beauty is a quality required of both sculptural images (*mūrti*) and dancers because, as the *Viṣṇudharmottara* states, 'the divinity draws near willingly if images are beautiful'.[21] Religious sculpture must therefore conform to the *śāstric* requirements of form, proportions and required marks or attributes (*lakṣaṇa*). Only in this way will the image be attractive to the deity represented and so allow the possibility of divine visitation. Through the enactment of certain rites the deity is 'invited' to grace the icon with his presence, whereupon the devotee or his agent, the Brahman priest, makes offerings and requests for divine benevolence (see Chapter 4).

The other great quality to be striven for by the artist in the production of a religious image is *prāṇa*, a concept that roughly translates as vital energy or breath. While in dance this is readily achieved through the medium of the human

body, in sculpture it is a far more difficult task. The bringing of life to sculpture through the infusion of *prāṇa* was the essential and ultimate challenge facing the Indian sculptor. The *āgama* texts are explicit on this matter. The *Svacchanda Tantra* stresses that 'all the activities...relating to various arts (*kāla*) and crafts (*śilpa*) are functions of *prāṇa*'[22] and the *Viṣṇudharmottara* states that this vital energy may be instilled in a stone sculpture by drawing the circle on the block of stone before commencing carving: 'The circle is the All [Universe]. The breath of life [*prāṇa*] is in its form, even as the mind is in man.'[23] This ritual is still performed today by the stone sculptors of Mamallapuram, Tamilnadu, who enact these invocations before commencing work on a major image. The sacred geometry is drawn with charcoal on the quarry-hewn block of stone, and provides the underlying formal structure to the composition that follows. Figurative representations are accommodated within the sacred circle.

The representation of the deity in human form is understood, according to the ancient commentaries, the *Upanishads*, as a striving to give form to the formless, to make tangible that which is, by its nature, intangible. Sculptural images are conceived as aids to meditation upon the deity, as a visualized *yantra* – a sacred diagram – meditation upon which will bring the devotee closer to the divine. The concept of *śilpa* (craft or skill) has Vedic origins and is the creative process manifest. It implies a level of dexterity whereby a craftsman creates an object endowed with 'rhythm' (*chandas*). The term *devaśilpa* (divine art) was widely used to imply a link with the gods. The divine creator most associated with knowledge in the skills of crafts (*śilpa*) is Prajapati, associated in Purāṇic myths with Brahmā, the Hindu deity of Vedic origins who came to be seen as presiding over all creative activity. Essential components of the artistic tradition were transmitted through the voice of Viśvakarman, a deity of lesser rank seen as the personification of creative energy who over time was identified as the divine architect and the patron of all the crafts. In later forms he is identified as the mythical founder of the science of architecture (*vāstuvidyā*).

Inscriptions indicate that by the Kushan period the word *śilpa* had become interchangeable with *citra*; the inscription on a Bodhisattva sculpture names its sculptor as 'Śrī Satana' and identifies him as the *citrakara*.[24] The guild of artisans specifically responsible for making images of the gods is known as *pratimākarā* (image maker), from the term *pratimā*, meaning 'reflected image', or art as a mirror of reality. It also implies that the image maker can give tangible form (that is, make visible) that which is otherwise invisible to the mundane world. His principal aid in this process of revelation is *śāstric* knowledge, as conveyed by the gods.

Reflected image – efficacy in Indian temple sculpture

Religious images in the Indian tradition gain their authority and potency in direct proportion to their conformity to the prescriptive rules (*śāstras*). These rules are laid down in the *śilpaśāstras*, and the efficacy of an image is assured only when it embodies the appropriate elements of measurement, proportion, attitude, iconography and adornment. If a sculpture is to perform its ritual function, it must be able to be read according to these measures. Of necessity, the connoisseurship of religious images is in turn moulded by the ritual requirement of the image. Secular aesthetic notions such as 'beauty' and 'quality' are accommodated within this *śāstric* tradition. The prescriptive texts are not exhaustive, however, and do allow for a considerable element of interpretation and innovation, as the stylistic diversity of Indian sculpture so clearly testifies. Indeed, it is the flexibility of interpretation of *śāstric* knowledge that has ensured that they retain such

authority among image makers and architects today – certainly makers still invoke *śāstric* authority, even if they do not in reality observe the rules closely.

In the *śāstric* literature a sculpted image is termed *pratimā*. This is taken to mean 'image', but as noted above more correctly translates as 'reflected image', which conveys with greater precision the intended meaning of Indian religious images, namely that they are representations intended to serve as symbolic *reflections* or 'mirror images' of the god, not the god himself. How the abstract concept of a deity was given mundane form was always a problem. It was resolved through a broad philosophical definition of naturalism in which both the manifest/visible and the unmanifest/invisible were important dimensions of that reflected reality. Naturalism and fidelity in Indian arts encompassed more than merely the visible; it allowed for those levels of reality not visible to the naked eye, but which exist by virtue of metamorphoses and the transmutability of phenomena. The *avatāras* – divine incarnations – so widespread in the Indian religious pantheon of gods are but one expression of this process of subtle transformation, which moves effortlessly between the manifest and invisible worlds (pl.51). The *śāstric* prescriptions operated within this system of an expanded reality.

The resulting icons serve as a conduit through which devotees can channel their worship to the gods. Once realized as an image of beauty, perfect in all its parts, a religious sculpture can serve as an efficacious vehicle for devotion. These essential tenets of image-making hold for all of India's early religions. Significant differences, however, arise in the manner in which the image is used. As stated, in a Hindu context the icon is a suitable receptacle for the deity to occupy temporarily during worship. To the Jains, the icon does not have this supernatural quality, but rather serves as a role model for the devotee, a reminder of the exemplary life lead by each of the Jinas ('conquerors' of karmic bondage). The principal icons represent the twenty-four *tīrthaṇkaras*, the 'ford crossers', the Jain saints and teachers who each attained spiritual perfection and founded a congregation of monks, nuns, laymen and laywomen. The Jinas are supported by a host of minor deities, especially *yakśas* and *yakśīs*, unliberated souls who can employ their supernatural powers to the benefit of devotees. In this sense, their role is analogous to that of Bodhisattvas in Buddhism, and the concepts may well have evolved in tandem. Independent icons of *yakśas* and *yakśīs* are a regular feature of medieval Jain temples and represent an important subset of imagery.

The Buddhist interpretation of images is rather more varied, depending on the school of Buddhist teaching followed. In Hīnayāna Buddhist circles, as exemplified by the southern Indian and Sinhalese traditions, icons of the Buddha served as role models for the faithful to follow. In more developed forms of the Mahāyāna tradition, especially those associated with the Vajrayāna school, the use of icons assumed a meaning more akin to Hindu practices. The Buddha assumed an array of forms and was supported by a cast of supplementary deities, capable of intervening in mundane affairs on behalf of a supplicant. Out of these practices emerged the cult of the Bodhisattva, the most beneficent being Avalokiteśvara, a deity of supreme powers of compassion who assumed a god-like status throughout the greater Buddhist world.

Parallels can be drawn with Viṣṇu, the supreme protector, and there can be little doubt that the Buddhist saviour Avalokiteśvara emerged partly as a response to the challenges presented by the growing popularity of the cult of Viṣṇu. The many esoteric forms of deities generated within late Mahāyāna, and more clearly within Vajrayāna, remained largely unknown to the lay community, having been created by advanced monastic practitioners through the practice of visualization.

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▶ Viṣṇu attending on Śiva and Pārvatī. Mural painting, Kailāsanātha temple, Kanchipuram. Tamilnadu. Early 8th century, Pallava period. Photograph by the author, 1993

Because these deities were created by advanced practitioners, they were generally confined for worship within the community of monks. A curious aspect of late-Buddhist iconography in eastern India is the introduction of 'Hindu' gods and goddesses within Buddhist imagery, where they perform a demonic role, an adaptation that reflects the social and religious tensions between the Buddhist community and the Hindu temple society.[25] Nonetheless, in Buddhist worship of all persuasions, the primary image remains that of the historical Buddha. It is the Buddha, along with the Bodhisattva and the Tārā, who attract the emotional devotion of the worshippers.

Common to all these faiths was the requirement that an icon must be complete and unflawed. This concern was at the heart of King Vajra's interrogation of Mārkaṇḍeya on the nature of image-making in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*. Improperly realized images will not do the task required of them, nor will those that are damaged in some way. The *Pratimāmanalakṣaṇam*, a *śilpaśāstra* text, grades the misfortunes that a faulty goddess image could incur: 'If it is burnt, worn out, broken or split up [it] will always be faulty. A burnt idol brings dearth of rain, a worn out one decrease in wealth. A broken image forebodes destruction in the family and the split up one, war.'[26]

The fourteenth-century Jain commentator Hakkura Pheru (1315) insisted that a damaged image should be disposed of carefully in a secure place that would protect the image's purity, but allowed for the possibility of damaged images still being employed ritually if they had originally been consecrated by a Jain monk of superior spiritual powers.[27]

Other sources were less forgiving, describing a flawed image to be 'as useless as a leaking pot'. Such images are to be discarded, preferably by being thrown into water. The frequency with which (broken) images have been recovered from tanks and wells supports this prescription. Inscriptions on medieval sculptures also confirm these practices. A late-twelfth-century Jain Pārśvanātha sculpture from Yalburga, in Karnataka, carries an inscription stating that the image was commissioned by a Jain devotee named Malli Setti to replace another which was vandalized during persecutions by a local Hindu ruler. The inscription states that the temple restoration, of which this sculpture commission was a part, was initiated by the 'excellent [Jain] teacher Rayacharya', and that the stone engraver Chakravarti Paloja carved the image (pl.57).[28]

The *śāstras* require that flawed images be discarded and replaced by new and complete sculptures. In special cases, the sculptured image of a god may be required to be renewed on a regular basis, as seen with the wooden image of Lord Jagannātha at Puri, in Orissa. In this case the discarded image is ritually buried in a secret location at night in the forest.[29] Both the act of disposal and that of choosing and felling the tree from which to fashion the new image are seen as highly dangerous moments, approached by the priests with great trepidation, as powerful and dangerous forces are unleashed at these times.

The efficacy of an image – its effectiveness in worship – is affected both by the way it is made by the artisan, and by the way that it is approached by the devotee. Correct procedures need to be followed in both cases. Guidance for the artisan is provided by the *śāstras*, and for the devotee by the *āgama* texts concerned with ritual. The leading scholars of Indian religious art history have adopted a variety of approaches to this subject over the past century. This in part reflects the lack of a clearly defined single philosophy in Brahmanism and acknowledges the multiplicity of streams of thought that are embodied in the term Hinduism. As seen in Chapter 1, the deities of early Hinduism are an amalgam of the Vedic gods and popular folk cult deities, transformed into a pantheon of gods from which individuals choose their personal deity.

Ananda Coomaraswamy, the pioneer Sinhalese scholar of Indian art history, saw the study of the Brahmanical pantheon in terms of expressions of metaphysical abstractions. He was an early defender of the view that the superhuman manifestations assumed by deities reflected a conscious attempt by those who helped shape the Brahmanical pantheon of gods to give concrete forms to abstract concepts.[30] In this view the deities represent a striving for a language of imagery (poetic and iconic) that would give tangible expression to religious concepts. They are, in essence, abstractions made manifest. The majority of Brahmanical deities exhibit a superhuman dimension. While the reforming sects of Jainism and Buddhism do not permit such 'superstitions' in their cult images, the associated demi-gods who populate their myths, legends and heavens often do.

Coomaraswamy's interpretations offer much to explain the multitudinous imagery generated in the Indian subcontinent in the era broadly stretching from the early centuries BCE to the middle of the first millennium CE. Attempts to comprehend these divine abstractions through the language of iconography are seen in the works of T.A. Gopinath Rao, C. Sivaramamurti and J.N. Banerjea. These scholars have elected to describe images of the gods in terms of their cosmological meaning, relating them to the Purāṇic myths and legends, and explaining the resultant iconography as a mundane expression of these higher meanings. In their immensely revealing contributions, these writers have done much to define the pantheon of deities that resulted from this period of theological turmoil. In relating the deities to this post-Vedic literature, they are situating them in a cosmological system in which their origins are explained in terms of Purāṇic myth.

A further generation of writers, most of them trained in the tradition of Sanskritic Indology, added a formalist approach. Heinrich Zimmer, Paul Mus, Alice Boner, Stella Kramrisch and Kapila Vatsyayan, each to varying degrees offered an analysis of individual sculpture in terms of its formal elements. Theirs was a search for the principles of composition assumed to underlie the complex outer forms. In this they drew directly on the body of *śāstric* literature that was being identified and studied as *texts* for the first time as an academic pursuit, rather than as a *tool* for practitioners. Each of these approaches has provided valuable leads to understanding the visual language and meaning of Indian sculpture.

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▼ Rock-cut *liṅga* in the river bed, Vijayanagar, Hampi, Karnataka. Photograph by the author, 1981

Raising up the image

Indian religious sculptures are of two types, natural and man-made. The first form in which a deity can be venerated is as a naturally occurring icon. This is known as the 'un-manifest' (*avyakta*) form, occurring without human intervention. It can typically take the form of a river-sculpted rock, such as the conch-like *śālagrāma* associated with Viṣṇu, and the *liṅga*-shaped *bāṇaliṅga* stone worshipped as Śiva. Other natural features of the landscape can serve this purpose equally well: an anthill, the abode of snakes, can be revered as a *liṅga* venerated by *nāgas* (pl.4). Clearly this class of icon falls outside the *śāstric* guidelines. Such images are often painted with coloured pigments by devotees without knowledge of the conventions; rather, they are guided by other rules, such as their belief in the power of colour to generate energy and spiritual 'heat'.

The realm of temple worship is dominated by images that are man-made, when they are termed *vyakta*, 'manifest', 'adorned'. Manifest images are either fixed and immovable (*acalamūrti*), usually of stone, or portable, when they are know as *utsava-mūrti* (festival image), or *cala* (movable/moving image), and are most typically cast bronze icons. A large-scale stone sculpture of a deity's cult image is installed in a temple's sanctuary, and other forms and deities enliven the exterior architecture. Portable images are used for worship in a temple's subsidiary shrines and celebrated in periodic temple processions (see Chapter 4). In both instances, the icons are crafted according to *śāstric* conventions. Such images are typically but not necessarily associated with temples; *liṅgas* sculptured into living rock are popular, particularly in riverbeds, as the seasonal flow of waters serves to 'lustrate' the images, thus pleasing the god (pl.52). Even these rock-cut *liṅgas* follow the appropriate conventions of proportions and markings.

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▼ Line drawing of Viṣṇu showing the system of measurement and proportioning according to the *tālamana* system; courtesy of V. Ganapati Sthapati, 2002

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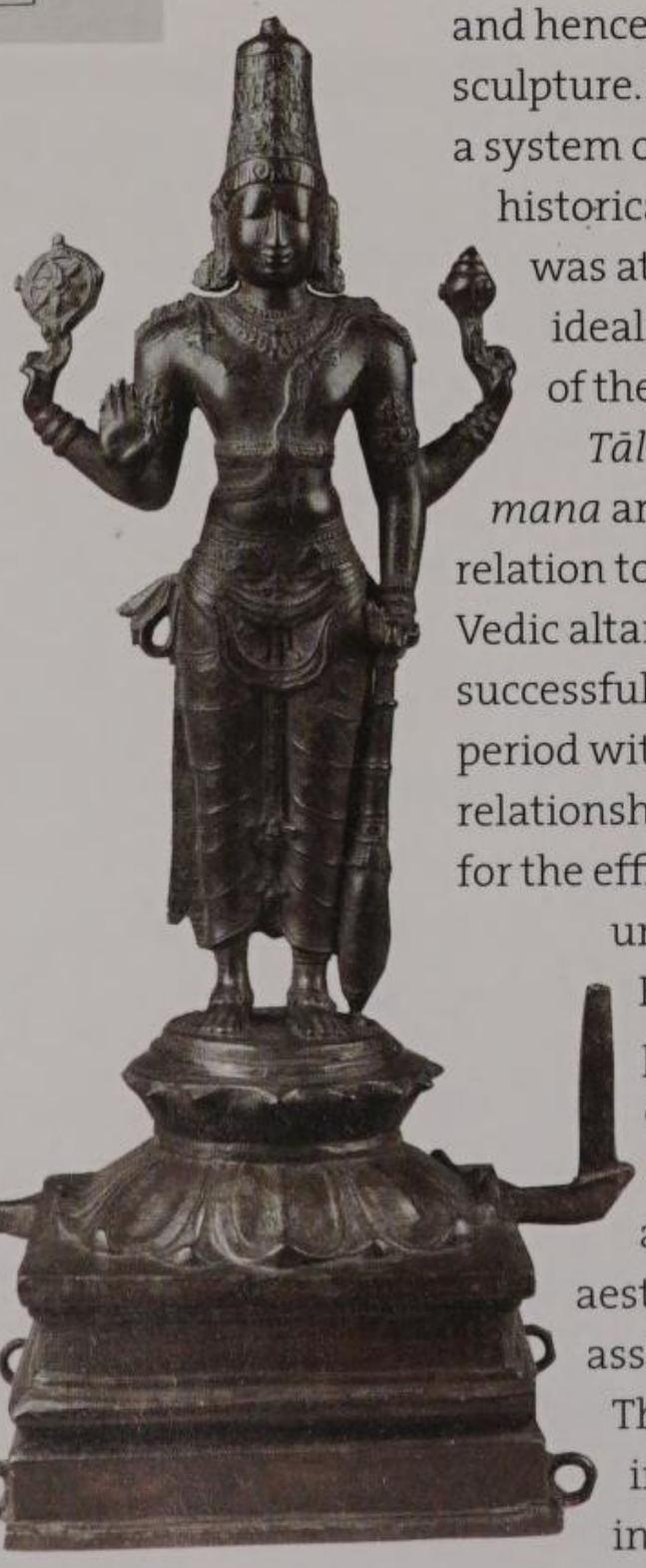
▼ Viṣṇu in his primary iconographic form (*sana bhaṅga*). Excavated in Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. 11th century, Cola period. Copper alloy. Height 76.2 cm. V&A: IM.127–1927. Bequest of Lord Curzon



The *Viṣṇudharmottara* asserts that realism was the goal, so that the image created was as if 'a shadow in a mirror'. Like a shadow, however, this image represents only one dimension of the divine, and in monochrome, not full colour. This evocative analogy reflects a long tradition of profound philosophical thought, in which images of gods are no more than an aspect of the divine that is ultimately formless and thus beyond mundane representation. Nonetheless, such representations were deemed necessary for devotional purposes and hence the early representation of gods in the image of man.

The tools employed included the science of proportionate measurement, ensuring consistency and elegance. To allow for the demands of complex postures and compositions, the rules of foreshortening were addressed, as was the need for human expression to convey mood and emotion. Special perspective was achieved with a keen understanding of the devices necessary to achieve the illusion of depth of field. The murals at Ajanta, executed during the fifth and sixth centuries, are among the most complete examples of these illusionist techniques being employed.

Measuring man

Fundamental to all devotional image-making is a system of measurements and proportions that has been in use since the late Vedic period. They are associated with *Puruṣa*, the primordial man, whose archetypal body provides the universal model for measurement, the basic unit of which is the span of his hand, measured as the distance from the extremities of the thumb and the middle finger. The theory of proportions (*tāla*) is built on the hand, which is in turn made up of twelve finger-widths (*aṅgulas*).[31] This allows a standard and objective measure. Measurement is the key to imposing order and logic to form – visual or audible – and hence is essential to the evolution of the visual arts, and especially to sculpture. *Tāla* evolved from a descriptive measure in the Vedic period into a system of prescriptive proportions linked to a code of idealized forms in the historical period. Hence the anthropomorphic unit of measurement, the hand, was at the root of a system of measuring and proportioning that defined idealized concepts of beauty and its counterparts, and allowed the expression of the full range of human emotions through an agreed visual language (*rasa*).

Tāla was used in consort with a measuring system (*mana*). The origins of *mana* are also Vedic, where its overriding meaning seems to be measurement in relation to building. It is most frequently used in relation to the construction of Vedic altars and ritual enclosures.[32] 'Correct measurement' was essential for the successful performance of Vedic rituals. This logic carried over into the historical period with the development of a system of measurement and a defined relationship of parts, the correct observance of which came to be seen as essential for the efficacy of devotional images. It is the task of a craftsman (*śilpin*) to understand the role of *mana* and translate it into a harmonious whole.

For the sculptor the defining measurement is the height, and the positioning and proportioning of the limbs is established by the use of a complex series of plumb lines (*lambasūtra*). Modular units of measurement are defined by universal units, from a grain of barley and a finger-width (*aṅgula*), allowing a high degree of precision, leading to aesthetic perfection as defined by the *śāstric* tradition. Iconometric canons assist the artisan to achieve a 'correct' set of proportions for an image.

The system is known as *tālamana* (measuring by *tāla*) and translates into a remarkably standardized concept of divine beauty, firmly rooted in the human ideal (pls.53–6).

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▼ Line drawing of Śrī Devi showing the system of measurement and proportioning according to the *tālamana* system, courtesy of V. Ganapati Sthapati, 2002

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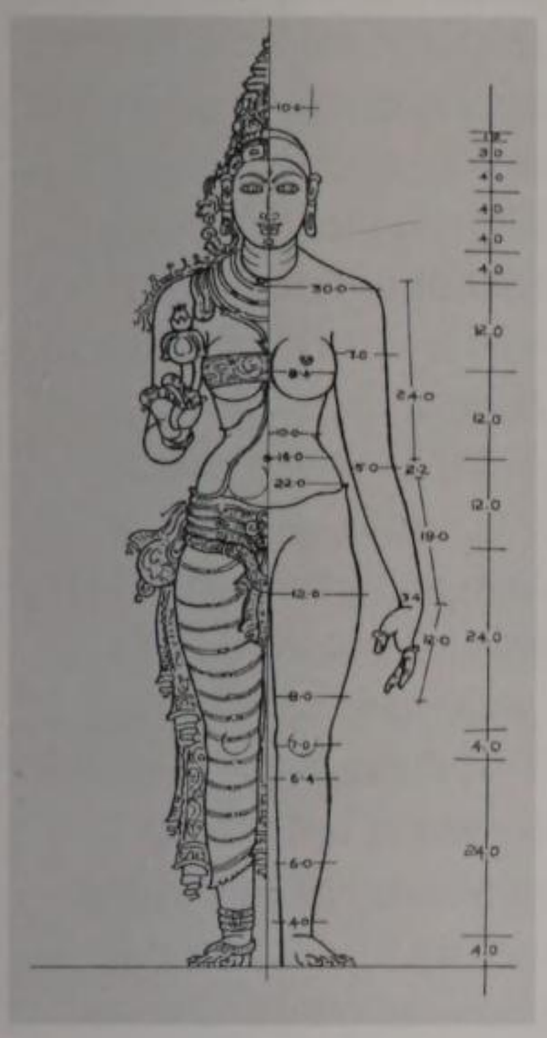
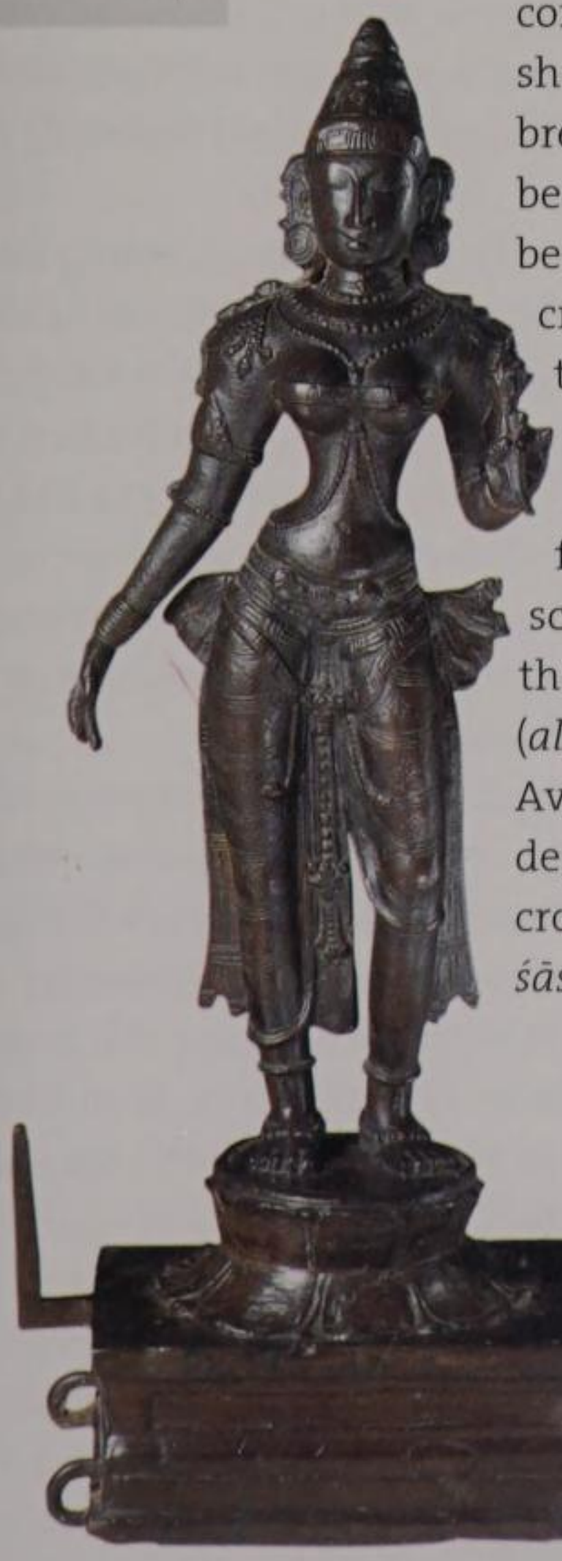
▼ Śrī Devi. Excavated in Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. 11th century, Cola period. Copper alloy. Height 53.6 cm. V&A: IM.149–1927. Bequest of Lord Curzon





The *śilpasūtras* prescribed that a visual composition, be it painted or sculptural, had an agreed pose (*bhaṅga*) and a prescribed position – standing (*sthāna*), seated (*āsana*) or reclining (*śayana*). This concept was then given order by imposing measurements (*mana*) on the various axes (vertical, horizontal and transverse) to establish relative proportions. This ensured that all the parts of an image were correctly scaled in relation to others in the composition. The same system was used to determine the relative scale of figures in a composite image, resulting in the hierarchic sizing of figures according to importance. Hence the texts not only define the relative height of a deity in terms of *tāla* spans, but also specify the spiritual benefits that accrue from conformity: a correctly realized deity would be capable of destroying sins, for example.

The system of *tālamana* is described with minor variations in a number of texts. The oldest surviving text devoted to this subject is the early sixth-century *Bṛhatsarihitā* by Varahamihira, which is rich in iconometric and iconographic detail.[33] This appears to be the source text for most other texts dealing with the proportional system of measurement in the visual arts. Chapters 35 to 37 of the *Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa*'s *Citrasūtra* are exclusively concerned with recounting these systems of measurements and proportions and their benefits. The gods are ranked in a strict religious hierarchy, with Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā at the summit. Then follow second-tier gods and the goddesses, their offspring, nature personifications, celestial attendants, musicians and dancers, and finally goblins and hunchbacks.[34]

The *tālamana* system provides the building blocks which underpin the conventions of beauty that define much that is admired in Indian sculpture. The shift from anatomic form to a more formalized geometry was to elevate the image to a subtler state of being, evoking a sense of divine presence. The result is conformity to a model of aesthetic beauty. The heroic male deity is broad shouldered and narrow hipped, while the female is slender waisted and full breasted, and both are youthful and athletic. The result is not uniformity, as might be expected, but rather a reflection of a shared ideal. These concepts of idealized beauty lie at the heart of the temple tradition of figurative sculpture, and clearly cross sectarian divides. Thus we see three south Indian images from around the twelfth century – a Viṣṇu, a Jina and a Buddha – each closely following shared conventions and received ideals of beauty as expressed in an idealized human form (pls.54 and 57–8). In the Buddhist world we can trace these conventions from the early sixth-century mural paintings at Ajanta (pl.61) to tenth-century sculpture from Sanchi (pl.60). Not only does the conventional proportioning of the body remain constant, but so too does much of the language of ornament (*alamkara*): the conventions for rendering the crown of the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara have shifted little in 800 years. It is startling to recognize the degree of continuity between a seventeenth-century Nepalese Buddhist ritual crown (pl.59), and that worn by the Ajanta Bodhisattva, painted according to *śāstric* conventions of around 500 CE.

Artists' manuals for image-making have only survived from the recent past, but it may be assumed that they were in circulation – and constant use – from as long as paper has been widely available in the subcontinent. A nineteenth-century Nepalese artists' technical manual sets out in carefully measured and scaled drawings directions for the making of Buddha and *chaitya* images (pl.63). A seated Buddha cast in the tenth- or eleventh-century Nepalese Licchavi period observes these same conventions (pl.62). This is a reminder of the extent to which the approach of Indian sculptors to the rendering of form has remained

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The Jina Pārśvanātha standing in the *kāyotsarga* meditation posture with arms hanging freely, the figure's proportions following *śāstric* conventions. Inscribed as the work of the stone sculptor Chakravarti Paloja. Gulbarga, Karnataka. 12th century, Western Calukya period. Black shale. Height 151 cm. V&A: IS.931

remarkably consistent, the apparent differences in style often having more to do with surface ornamentation than with underlying structure. Together these systems of measurement and proportioning achieved a level of consistency of form unrivalled in any sculptural tradition, and one sustained for over 2,000 years. Early sculpture workshop practices, such as those at Mathura in the early centuries of the first millennium CE, evidently followed a non-sectarian approach. Artisans were commissioned to make sandstone images for all three faiths according to this shared system of craft knowledge and in conformity to accepted canons of beauty. In the case of Kushan-period Buddha and Jina images, they can often only be differentiated if their vital cognitive marks survive intact.

These systems were employed in the service of all faiths. Similar iconometric diagrams exist for the making of Jain and Buddhist images – schematic plans and artists' sketchbooks belonging to each of the faiths make it clear that a common approach was followed. In the case of Buddhism, in addition to the measuring and proportioning systems, prescriptive rules relating to the Buddha's unique physiognomy and sacred marks (*lakṣaṇas*) added a further layer of conformity in image-making (pl.45). A Jain diagrammatic plan for making a sculpture of a Jina has the system of *tāla* and *mana* at its centre, and ensured that Jina ensembles of this type exhibit a remarkable uniformity through time (pls.64–5).

The *śāstras* do not limit themselves to defining the underlying forms; they also address issues of ornamentation and beauty. They provide a formally defined system of embellishment necessary to please the deity and thus secure grace. The Sanskrit word for ornament, *alamkara*, has the specific meaning of 'to make sufficient'; that is, ornament is understood in the Indian view as something necessary to make an object complete.[35] In the context of worship, the meaning is very clear – that an icon must be appropriately ornamented in order to be fit and ready for its religious task. The adornment of images takes many forms, but typically the image is dressed in fine cloth – a silk sari with golden threads is very acceptable – then adorned with sets of temple jewellery expressly commissioned for this purpose, and finally garlanded in fresh flowers.

According to the *āgama śāstras*, beauty is a necessary prerequisite for the divinity to enter the devotional icon (*mūrti*). Beauty is defined as having all the requisite auspicious marks (*lakṣaṇa*), as well as observing the system of measurements and proportions. The *Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa* stresses adherence to the *lakṣaṇas*: 'Hence the wise man should create and worship images of gods endowed with all the features ... and never those devoid of [the prescribed] features.'[36] The *Viṣṇudharmottara* sums up the importance of these rules and systems, all of which contribute to the achievement of an Indian aesthetic ideal image of the heroic deities.

The *śāstras* are exacting in their demands. Sculpted images must be without fault to fulfil the tasks required of them, conforming to the canons in all necessary details. The image is conceived as a visualized *yantra* (sacred diagram), meditation upon which would bring the devotee closer to divinity. This sacred geometry is embedded in the image from the outset, with the drawing of a circle on the block of stone before carving. It is the task of the master sculptor to be conversant with these rules of sacred geometry as well as to be highly proficient in the skills in his art.

The maker

The necessary guidance for the artisan is provided by a knowledge of the *śāstras*. They require that the sculptor (or indeed any religious image-maker) must enter into complete self-identification with the deity. This can best be achieved through yogic practices, combining physical and mental disciplines to achieve heightened

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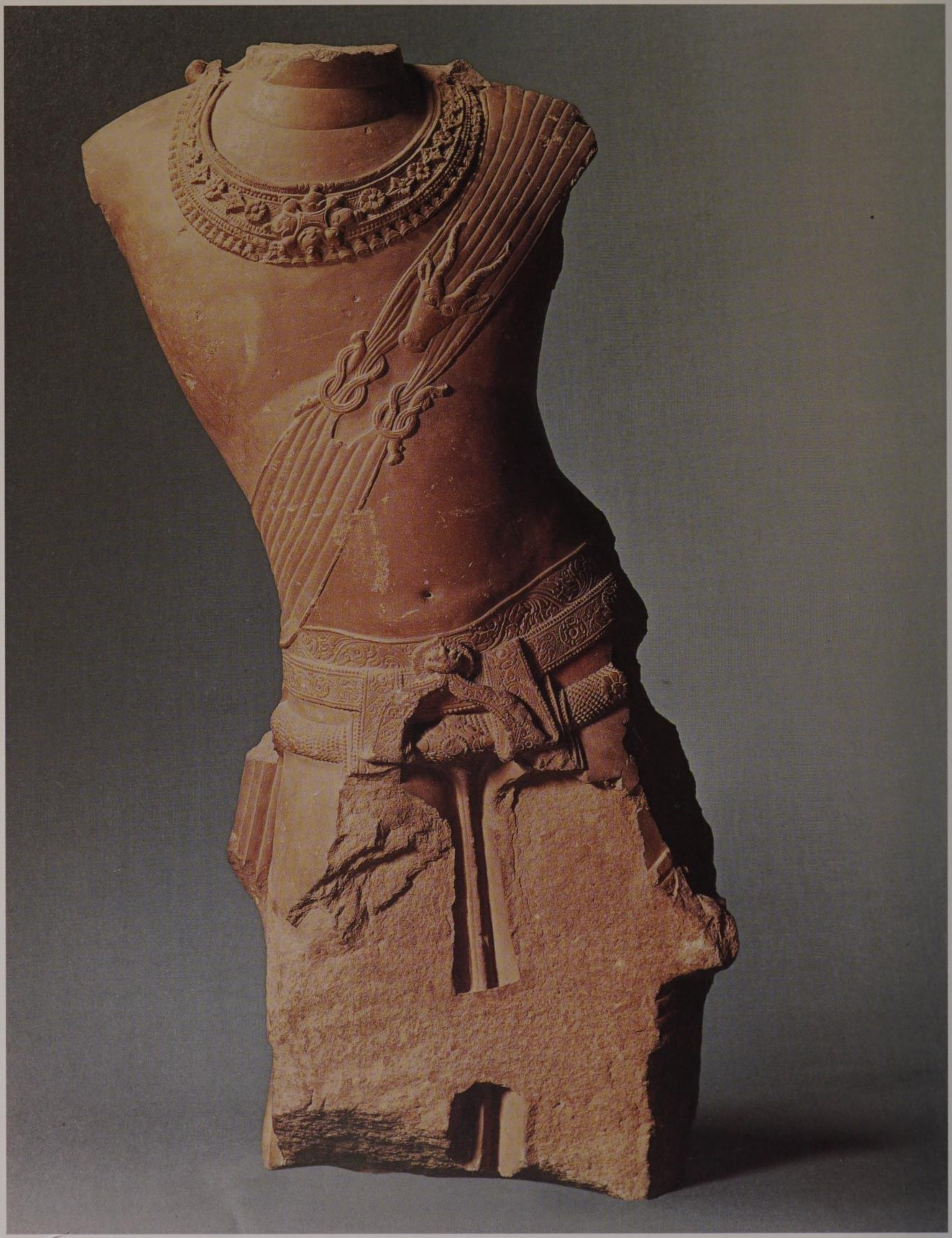
▶ Processional icon of the Buddha offering protection. This majestic standing Buddha, and the standing figure of Pārśvanātha (pl.57), both follow shared *śāstric* conventions. Nagapattinam, Tanjavur District, Tamilnadu. 11th–12th century, Cola period. Copper alloy, solid cast and mercury gilded. Height 68.6 cm. V&A: IPN.2639

powers of experience and knowledge. Penance is often cited as a means of an artist attaining superior skills in his craft. Meditations on the deity to be represented are recommended, to achieve greater insight into the god's nature. Through the power of prayer the artist seeks the deity's permission to create his likeness. Further prayers are recited to ensure that the image-maker is spiritually cleansed before embarking on the task of making an icon of the divine.

Generally, those trained in the art of image-making belong to higher caste artisan clans. This status reflects the sacred nature of their work and the responsibilities for spiritual welfare that they carry. There are instances of ruler-patrons involving themselves intimately in the design process; in one case a ruler, King Bhoj of Dhar (1010–53), responsible for the unfinished Bhojeshvara temple – the biggest temple ever attempted in the history of temple building in south Asia – devoted energies to authoring, no doubt with the close aid of his architects



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▶ A ritual crown, worn by Vajracarya Buddhist priests in Nepal. Vajracarya ('master of the thunderbolt') is both a caste and a family name indicating those entitled to perform priestly functions; they command the highest rank in the Nepalese Buddhist community, equivalent to Brahmans. A similar crown, with its five-pointed diadem, is worn by a 14th–15th-century Nepalese sculpture of Padmapāṇi in the V&A, and both may be traced directly to the late 5th-century Ajanta mural of the same subject (pl.61). Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Dated by inscription to 1677 (Nepal Samvat 797). Gilt copper alloy with inset stones. 76 cm. V&A: IS.5–1946. Given by E.W.A. Armstrong

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◀ The Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara, from a Buddhist triad installed in a shrine at Sanchi monastery, *c.*late 9th or 10th century. Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh. Sandstone. Height 84.6 cm. V&A: IM.184–1910

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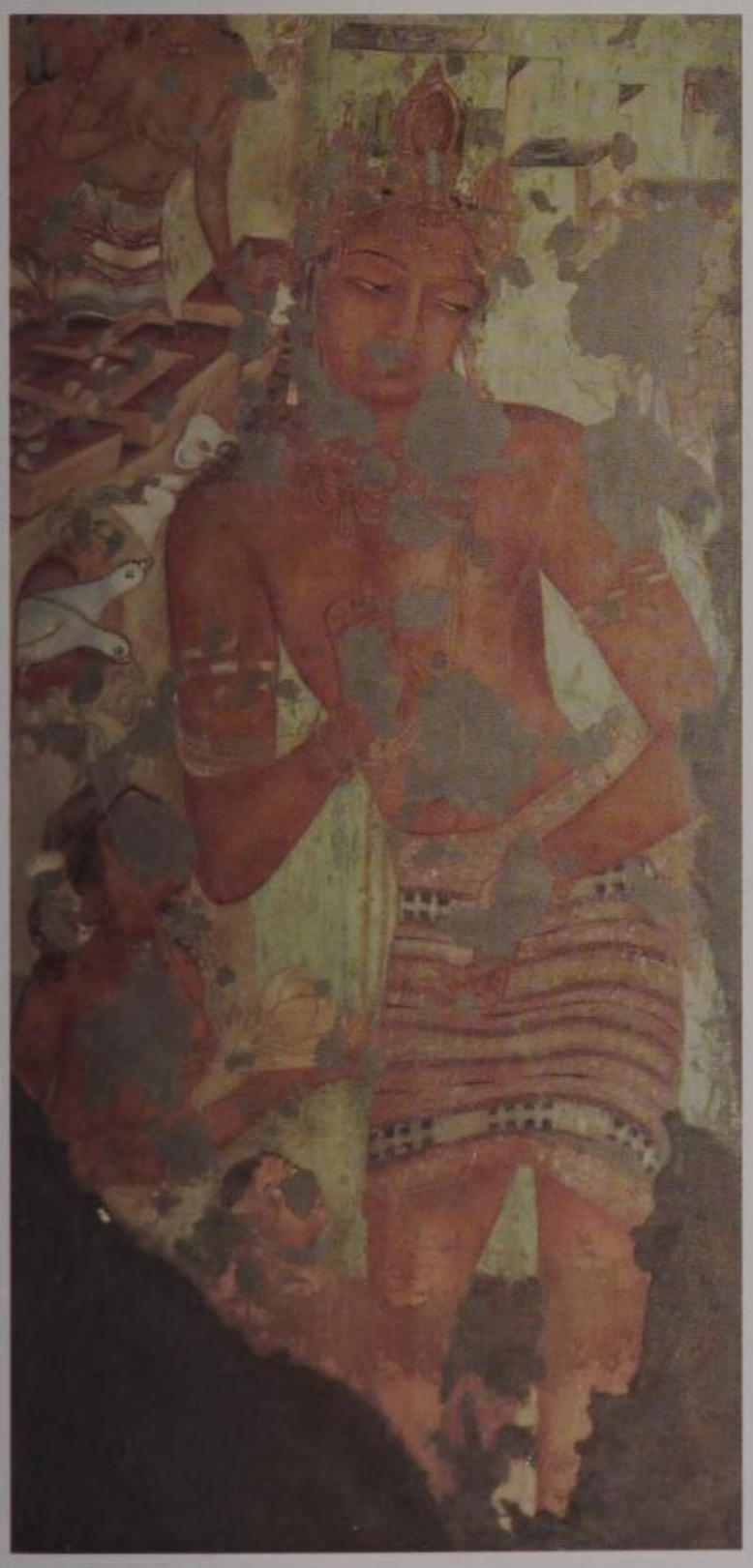
▼ The Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara. Copy of the mural in Cave 1, Ajanta, Maharastra, late 5th century, Vakataka period, by John Griffiths and pupils of the Bombay School of Art in 1877–8. Oil on canvas. V&A: IS.14–1885



(*sthapatis*), a new compendium manual on the science of architecture, the *Samaranganasūtradhara*.[37] In such a climate, the status of architects, artists and skilled artisans was able to benefit. Some image-makers claim to be Brahmans by virtue of their assumed descent from the divine architect-cum-craftsman creator, Lord Viśvakarman (All-maker). This claim is disputed by Brahman priests, with whom they often come into conflict over rights to officiate when images come to be installed.

The craftsmen known as Viśvakarmas, such as those in Karnataka and Tamilnadu today, claim descent from Brahmā, and his five aspects (*panchamukha*) are given form as the five archetypal craftsmen, each with a discrete craft activity. *Śilpi* (craftsman) Brahmā is seen as the creator of idols, and from him is descended the profession of sculptors. A copperplate inscription from Tanjavur dated 247 CE contains the earliest reference to the activities of these craft guilds, naming the engraver as 'Viśvkaarm Acharya', perhaps best understood as 'one guided by Viśvakarman'.[38]

The Viśvakarma craftsmen claim a high status because of their independence, in which they not only complete their craft activity without dependence on others, but also are ritually independent, being qualified to perform the necessary rites associated with the sacred art of image-making without the intervention of Brahman priests. This is a second strand to their claim to be Brahmans themselves. They celebrate their independence in the images they make of their patron deity, who is represented surrounded by their trade tools and implements, a unique concept in Indian religious imagery.

It is required that all craftsmen perform rituals at intervals in the creation process. These begin with the identification of the stone appropriate to the deity's gender, to be cut from the quarry when a Gaṇeśa *pūjā* is performed – to remove obstacles – and conclude with the eye-opening ceremony, which takes place immediately after the image is installed in its intended sanctum. At each of the preparatory rituals, the sculptor's tools are laid before the block of stone, for blessing, along with simple offerings.[39] The master sculptor and his apprentices and assistants, usually his sons, work on the block in stages, chiselling from coarse to fine with a range of tools (pl.66).

The intended image, which has been in the sculptor's mind since selecting the stone at the quarry, is outlined in charcoal and coloured powder. The master sculptor makes the first marks, and then allows his assistants to rough out the image. The chisels must be continuously sharpened by an apprentice, and a blacksmith's furnace is kept burning for this purpose. The finishing of the surface is the task of the master sculptor, performed with fine chisels. All is finished, apart

from the eyes, which are ritually opened only when the image is installed. On the appointed delivery day, which has been deemed auspicious, a further ceremony is performed, again by the Viśvakarma craftsman, in the presence of the patron or his agent. This consists of four separate *pūjās*: a Gaṇeśa *pūjā*, a purification rite, a *pūjā* to honour Viśvakarman and a final one to honour the deity represented.[40] This is paid for by the patron.

The preparation of metal images follows similar ritual procedures. The casting of processional icons is the responsibility of the master founder. The modeller, usually a copper smith, works using a lost-wax (cire-perdue) technique. Religious images are required to be cast in the sacred five metals (*pañcaloha*), gold, silver, copper, brass and iron, each of which is linked to a deity and a planet, ensuring a high degree of auspiciousness. The presence of these elemental metals serves to evoke the universe in the form of the chosen deity. The percentages of metals vary according to the deity represented, but a higher proportion of copper (in excess of 80 per cent) is required, for example, for wrathful deities.[41]

The lost-wax technology follows a standard procedure, and ritual almanacs are consulted to ensure that the most critical stage in the process – the casting – occurs on an auspicious day. First the chosen subject is modelled in a beeswax and lampblack preparation and allowed to harden (pl.67), whereupon it is coated in a succession of layers of clay to the desired thickness that will withstand the molten metal. A temporary outdoor furnace is prepared and on the appointed day, fired. The wax is first melted out of the mould. The furnace and crucible with the selected metals are the focus of a *pūjā* to ensure success, whereupon the metals are heated in the crucible and the mould is warmed to a similar temperature. Swiftly, the molten metal alloy is poured from the crucible into the mould; carefully positioned spruces serve to channel the metal, while others allow the hot gases to escape. Once poured, the mould is left to cool before the clay casing is broken away to reveal the cast image. The surface is rough at this stage, and after much chiselling and then chasing, it is ready for filing and the engraving of details (pl.68). After polishing, the image is ready for delivery to its patron.

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▲ Buddha preaching, his hands in the gesture of 'turning the wheel [of Buddhist Law]' (*dharmacakramudrā*). This alludes to his preaching the first sermon in the deer park at Sarnath, in Bihar, where the Buddha assembled his community of followers, the first *saṅgha*. Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. Gilt copper. Height 14 cm. V&A: IS.37–1988

Opening the eyes – the consecration rituals

The consecration (*ādhivāsa*) and installation ceremony (*mūrti-pratiṣṭhā*) of the stone sculpture begins the night before the appointed day, when the sculptor prepares a small *yantra* engraved on a small square of five-alloy sheet metal (*pañcaloha*). He does this through the night, in the temple compound. The design will depend on the deity being dedicated, and when installed beneath the icon, will have the power to attract both the god himself and devotees. The ceremony begins in the early hours of the appointed day. The pedestal is prepared and the

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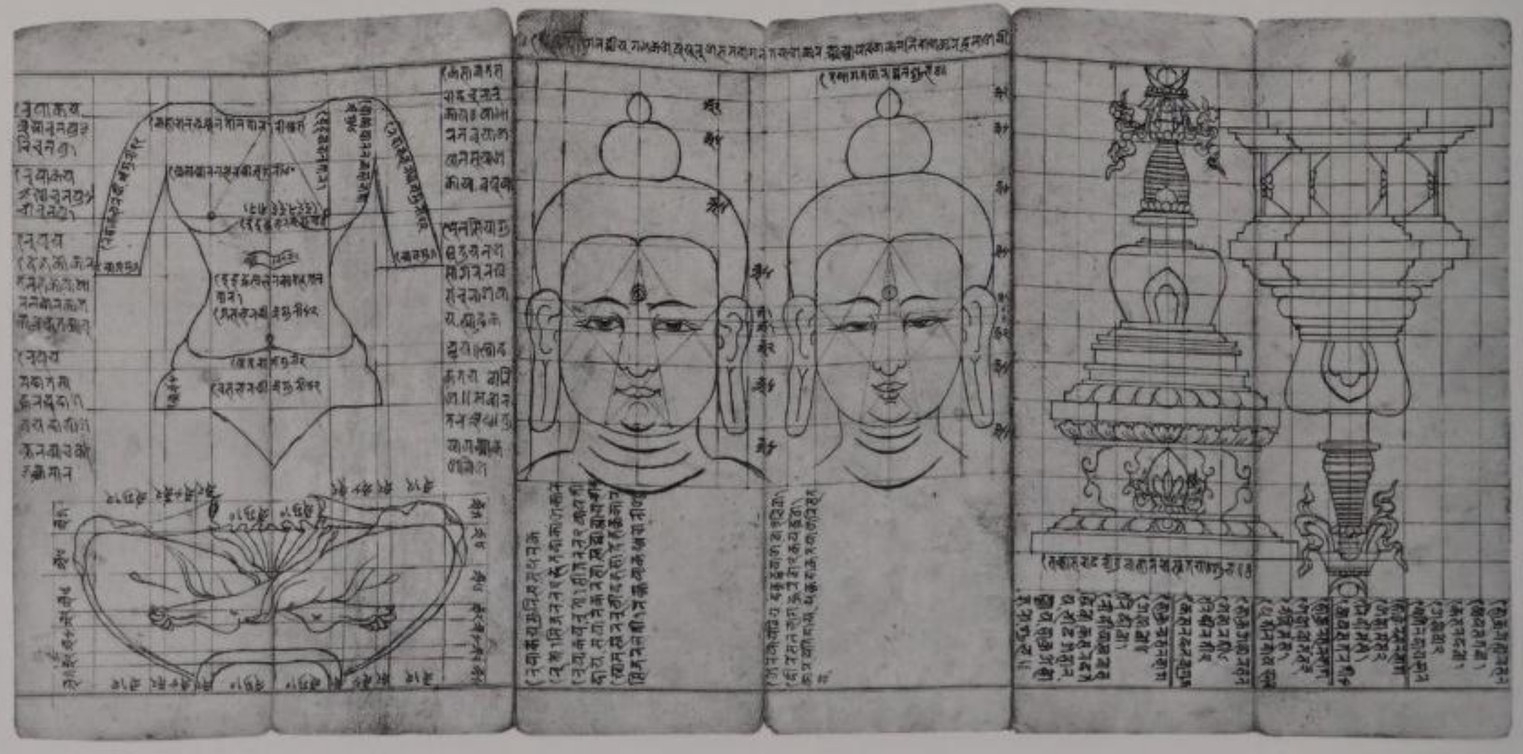
▶ A manual for the manufacturing of Buddha images and *caityas*. Text in Newari. Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. 19th century. Ink on paper. Height 25.6 cm. Private collection



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▶ Enthroned Jina Śāntinātha, displaying a highly conventionalized design following an ordering system of measurements. Dated by inscription 1168. Western India, probably Rajasthan. Copper alloy with silver and copper inlay. Height 104.2 cm. V&A: 930 IS

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▼ Iconometric line drawing for the production of an image of the enthroned Jina Pārśvanātha. From a sculptor's manual. Ink on paper. 20th century. Courtesy P.O. Sompura

mantra, made by the sculptor and 'strengthened' with a paste prepared by holy men (*ṛiṣis*) from fifteen forest substances, is inserted in the pedestal socket. The sculpture's tenon is ritually 'heated' and then inserted into the pedestal, together with a fixing solution. At intervals during this process, a series of thanksgiving ceremonies is performed elsewhere in the temple complex. That same morning a final consecration ceremony is performed, the eye-opening ceremony. This begins with a fire (*homa*) *pūjā*, followed by a ritual bathing (*abhiṣeka*), after which the sculptor, working behind a curtain and using a golden chisel and silver hammer, finishes the eyes of the image. The 'opening' of the eyes is the symbolic giving of vision to the image. It is the last task of the craftsman. The sculpture is now ready to receive the deity.

The worship of icons in Jainism is confined to one sect of the Śvetāmbara tradition, the Murtipūjākas. Jain rituals surrounding the installation and

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▲ Master craftsmen (*sthapati*) working at a sculpture studio, Mamallapuram, Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, 1981

consecration of images follow similar procedures to those just described for Hinduism, although Jain commentators would insist that they have a different symbolic intent. Nonetheless, a divine presence would appear to be invoked by Jain consecration ceremonies, in defiance of Jain scriptural requirements. This ambiguity between scripture and practice has existed throughout much of the history of Jain image worship and persists in contemporary practice.[42]

Central to the consecration of a new Jina image is the eye-opening ceremony, known to the Jains as 'eye-needle' ceremony. The following description is based on John Cort's observations and interviews with monks in Gujarat between 1985 and 2000:

> The ritual usually takes place in the middle of the night, an auspicious time for such a powerful undertaking. The monk first purifies himself through meditation. He ritually ensures that the image is in a spiritually stable condition, so that the consecration will be successful. He uses a golden needle to brush a paste of powdered gems onto the outlines of the eyes of the image. The monk looks at the image in a mirror whilst reciting a *mantra* (spell) calling on the Jina's omniscience to illuminate the cosmos.[43]

Further *mantras* are recited and paste is applied to the image to 'secure' them to it as protective talismanic marks. Cort's observations make it clear that the monk repeatedly invites the Jina to enter the icon through the reciting of specific *mantras*, an invocation directly analogous to Hindu practice, which allows for the ritual possibility of *darśana*, the devotee 'seeing' God through visual interaction with the ritually empowered icon. These modern-day Jain ritual practices derive principally from the *Pratiṣṭhā Kalpa*, a manual known from early-seventeenth-century recensions.

Buddhism in India recognized the potency of image veneration from at least the first century CE, a practice it had, in all probability, witnessed serving the Jain community to great advantage. The ritual procedure for the consecration of Buddha images is provided in the text *Buddha Abhiṣeka*. This is known from many sources and recensions, but the text retains an essential unity, absorbing elements of older works, including the *Buddhavamsa* ('Chronicle of the Buddhas'), the *Cariyapiṭaka* ('Basket of Conduct'), the *Jātakas* ('Birth Stories of the Buddha') and the Pali *Nadana Katha* ('Life of the Buddha').[44] The 'Consecration of Buddha [Image]' text is recited as an enlivening ritual before the image's installation in a monastery temple or home. It is intended to infuse the image with the two essential Buddha qualities, supreme knowledge and wisdom (*dharma*), and the super-mundane powers achieved through the renunciatory practices undertaken on the path to enlightenment (*nirvāṇa*).

All traditional faiths use small portable metal images for ritual circumambulations (*pradakṣiṇa*) and festival processions. In the case of Hindu processional images, offering rites are performed by the maker, invoking in turn Gaṇeśa (with rice and coconut, the milk used to lustrate the new icon), Viśvakarman (with five vessels containing coconuts) and finally Kali (represented by the craftsman's hammer and chisel). A more elaborate Brahmanical ritual procedure is provided in the *Bṛhatsarihitā*: the patron of a new icon should erect a temporary pavilion (*maṇḍapa*) for this purpose, decorated with ornamental arches (*toraṇas*) and colourful banners, with an earthen altar covered with sand and *kusa* grass (sacred to Brahmā). The icon, resting on the altar, is repeatedly bathed in scented waters, including auspicious waters from sacred places (*tīrthas*), Vedic *mantras* are recited and *homa* (fire) sacrifice is offered. After this the icon is dressed in new cloth and ornaments donated by the patron, and it is then worshipped with flowers and sandal paste. It is transported to the temple

sanctuary accompanied by the sounds of conch shells and trumpets; there further offerings are made in the deity's honour. A piece of gold is placed in the socket of the pedestal base to receive the icon, and it is positioned there, with great care, and secured. By so honouring the deity, the Brahmans who provided priestly direction and the image-maker, great spiritual merit is accrued to the donor.[45] Finally the priests perform the eye-opening ritual (which may or may not have already been performed by the craftsman) (pl.69).

The sculptures ritually enlivened in the procedures outlined above are now ready to serve as instruments for meditation and prayer. Through the installation ritual, the image is now deemed to house the deity's power (*śakti*). Before worship is commenced, however, the image must undergo a further life-instilling ritual, the giving of breath (*prāṇapratiṣṭhā*). This ritual is performed to infuse life into the image for the first time, and is repeated at the commencement of every *pūjā* performed thereafter. *Prāṇa* is variously translated as 'breath', 'vital energy', that

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▶ Master bronze sculptor (*sthapatī*) covering a wax model with wet clay, preparatory to casting in copper alloy. Swamimalli, Tanjavur District, Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, 2002

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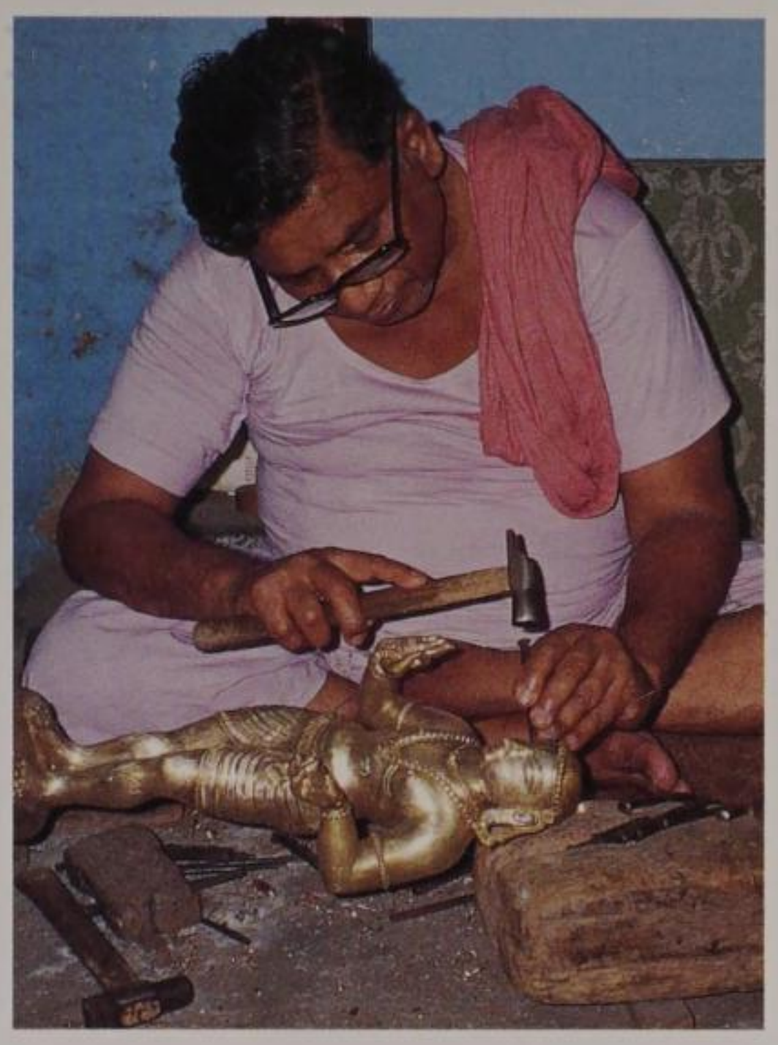
▶ Master bronze sculptor (*sthapatī*) S. Devasenapathy doing the final preparation of a new icon, before its consecration. Swamimalli, Tanjavur District, Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, 2002



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▶ Priests performing an *āratī pūjā* for icons at the conclusion of their processional use during the night-long celebration of the annual Brahmotsavam festival. Cheluve Narayana temple, Melukote, Karnataka. Photograph by the author, 2003

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◀ Śaivite Brahman Śrī K.A. Sabharatna Śiva carya demonstrating the rite of invocation (*āvāhana*) as performed for a Śiva *liṅga* during daily worship (*nityapūjā*), Chennai. Photograph by Richard Davis, 1984

vibrant element which is the basis of all life. The concept is central to yogic discipline, which played an important role in Vedic austerities. In Vedic cosmology *prāṇa* is described as the *amṛta*, the nectar of life extracted from the churning of the ocean of milk.

The central role of *prāṇa* in the visual arts is acknowledged in the *Svacchanda Tantra*: 'All the activities related to various arts [*kala*] and crafts [*śilpa*] are functions of *prāṇa*.'[46] The life-force breath is understood to reside at the centre of the circle, the centre of the artistic conception; in figurative sculpture it resides at the navel, the point from which the creation of an image should begin, according to the *Viṣṇudharmottara* (Book II, 10).

The relationship of sculpture to *prāṇa* is poetically described by Stella Kramrisch:

> It is as though in Indian art the image is embossed from within by the movement of breath, or circulation, through the vital centres of the living being, unimpeded by the gross matter of the actual physical body. A plastic quality results that is as though carried by the living breath with which the image is filled, conducted by the smooth channels of body and limbs. These smooth channels have a pristine glow and a continuity of outline as though what they hold were an equivalent of the breath of God.[47]

The mechanics of infusing the image with *prāṇa* using a yogic breathing technique are clearly described in the *Gandharva Tantra*:

> After having controlled his breath through *prāṇayāna*, the initiate (facing the image) should take up a handful of flowers...then meditate upon the supreme deity...and infuse his breath into the flowers which, when offered, serve as the vehicle to convey the devotee's life breath into the image.

Thus the image of mundane material is given life (pl.70). Throughout the ensuing act of worship, the two images – the inward image in the devotee's mind, and the outward material image – are filled with *prāṇa*. At the conclusion of worship the life breath is withdrawn through another breathing rite, after which the outward image is again without life. It is the concept of *prāṇa* that best explains the role of the sculptured image as a 'utensil of worship', a tool to assist the devotee in his quest for union with the divine.

3 The Temple Setting

Ritual action and architectural form express one and the same meaning. The structure of the temple accompanies, follows and translates into a relative permanence the rites and their rhythmic formulas.
S. Kramrisch[1]

The temple as body

In religious terms the temple serves as the 'body' of the god, with the inner chamber/sanctum sanctorum (*garbhagṛha*, womb house) as its spiritual centre. Installed in the womb house is the sculpture of the cult image (*pratimā*), which serves as the principal focus of worship and the object of the devotee's *darśana*. In a Śaiva temple, this is invariably the phallic *liṅga*, emblematic of Śiva (pl.73); in a Vaiṣṇava temple the image (*mūrti*) under veneration is that of Viṣṇu, or one of the variant forms in which he has appeared, his *avatāras*. The chosen icon is set on a moulded pedestal (*pīṭha*), which usually also functions as a basin for directing the flow of lustration fluids. In the case of the *liṅga*, it is modelled to be evocative of female genitalia, thus making the progenative powers of Śiva explicit. In the case of Jain ṭemples, the sanctuary houses a sculptural image of one of the Jain saviours (*tīrthaṇkaras*), usually mounted in a marble (often silver-clad) platform designed to receive lustrations. The architectural form of Jain temples does not differ in any fundamental way from Hindu temples, although the freer access for devotees to the sanctuary has resulted over time in more room for assembly being provided.

The fundamental form upon which the temple is modelled is that of *Puruṣa*, the cosmological primeval man from whose body parts the material universe was created. This sacrificial concept is embedded deep in the Vedic past. The *Vāstuśāstra* text on architecture makes explicit the defining role of the *Puruṣa* concept. It is explained through myth:

> In ancient times a terrible *Puruṣa* was born...Seeing him the gods were frightened. Then discussing the matter mutually and taking hold of him all collectively, they pressed him downfaced and then threw him all at once on the surface of the earth. He is called *Vāstupuruṣa*.[2] (pl.74)

The imprint of his body provided the template for the temple (pl.77). The body-temple concept underlies all variant traditions of Indian temple design.[3] It was translated into the very form of the Indian temple in which the constituent parts of the body were evoked as components of the building. The elevation was conceived as elements of the standing human body (pl.75). The summit of the tower, the decorative *āmalaka*, is equated to the head, the tower (*śikhara*) to the body's trunk. The sanctum (*garbhagṛha* or *vimāna*) is the nerve centre, located at the navel (*nābhi*), and houses the soul (*atman*), represented by the consecrated image. The transept projections from the *mahā-maṇḍapa* are

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◀ **Entrance to the sanctuary of a Śaiva temple. The sculptural programme is elaborate: the threshold is decorated with lions and subterranean deities making offerings, the door jambs depict the river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā, Viṣṇu on Garuḍa projects from the lintel, and above Śiva is seen dancing, flanked by celestial couples (*mithuna*). Mukhacatuski temple, west porch, Surwaya, Shivapuri. Madhya Pradesh, c.10th century. V&A SSEA Archive**

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▶ Interior view of *mahā-maṇḍapa* with seated Nandi. Hoysala temples were particularly successful at evoking the cave-like ancestry of the temple interior. Hoysalesvara temple, Halebid. Mid-12th century, Hoysala period. Photograph by the author, 1981

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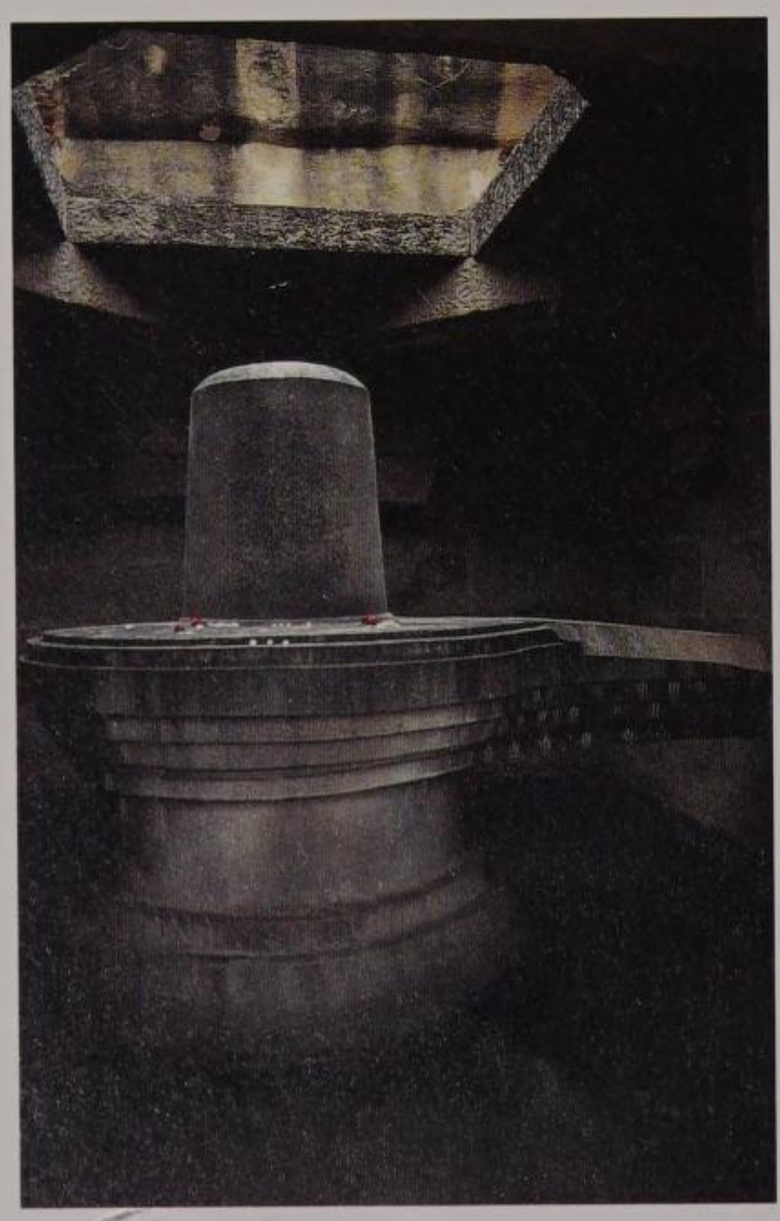
▼ Monumental *liṅga* and lustration basin (*yoni*) in the sanctuary of a ruined Śaiva temple, near to the Balakṛṣṇa temple, Hampi, Karnataka. 15th–16th century, Vijayanagar period. Photograph by the author, 1981



defined as the outstretched hands (*hasta*) and pillars, and the lower plinth or platform is represented by the feet (*pāda*). Through the temple-figure runs a vertical axis, known as the *brahmasūtra*, the pillar, which unites earth and sky. The human form thus served as a metaphor for both the body of the deity and the temple itself.

In plan and elevation the Hindu temple is realized according to the *śāstric* rules of measurement. Ritual diagrams known as *vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala* define the units that make up the temple plan. Temples are conceived on a plan of normally sixty-four or eighty-one squares (*pādas*), each assigned a presiding deity, but always with Brahmā at the centre.[4] Each of the gods who cast down *Vāstupuruṣa* is associated with that part of the plan according to which part of the *Puruṣa*'s body they were originally holding. As the name implies, the building (*Vāstu*) is conceived in terms of the body parts of primordial man (*Puruṣa*), the source and progenitor of the material world. *Puruṣa* was the first and ultimate sacrifice and, according to Indian cosmology, all the constituent parts of the material world, including the planets, were created out of his body parts. As both the model and measure of all things, it is hardly surprising that both religious sculpture and the temple plan were conceived in terms of this over-arching concept. The use of the sculpted human body as a vehicle for worship touches on another aspect of temple design, its explicit analogy with the cosmic man. The body is conceived in Indian metaphysics as an 'abode', a sanctuary for the human spirit or soul (*atman*) (pls.78–79). From this concept it was a small step to conceive the temple in anthropomorphic terms.

In addition, the priest and architect directing a temple building project must take account of the *āgama* texts, which prescribe rituals necessary for the construction of the temple. These began appearing with the expansion in the growth of temple building from around the seventh and eighth centuries CE, and were expressly intended to aid temple ritual. The *āgamas* give instruction in the selection and preparation of a temple site, and directions for the efficacious building of the temple and the siting of divine images. Specific rituals are provided for the installation of the central *liṅga* and the other deities.

The form of the temple is also conceived as a model of the celestial palace on top of a heavenly mountain. The earliest extant architectural (*vāstu*) texts are explicit in making this connection: the principal temple types are named after the holy mountains Meru, Mandara and Kailasā. In some instances this symbolism is further underscored in the chosen name for the temple, as in the eighth-century

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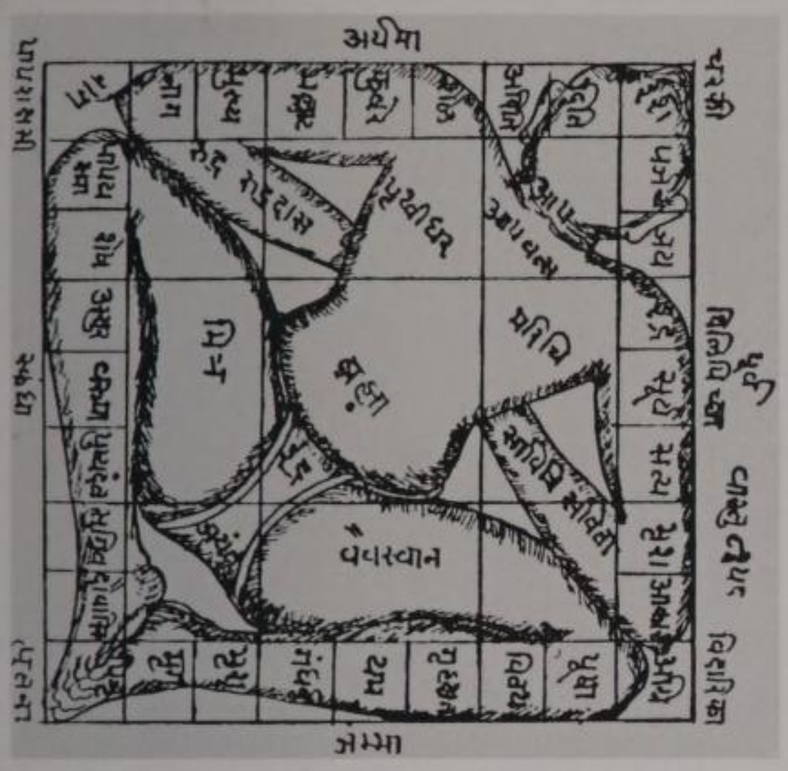

▼ Puruṣa, the Primeval Cosmic Man, progenitor of the universe. This configuration provides the template for the temple plan. Line drawing courtesy A. Volwahsen

Pallava king Narasimhavarman II's great Śiva temple in Kanchipuram, Kailasānatha. Similarly, the Cola king Rājarāja chose to refer in his donor inscriptions to his great temple in Tanjavur, the Brhadisvara temple (popularly known as the Rājarājeśvara), as his Maha-meru or Dakṣiṇa-meru, his great Mount Meru of the south.

Images of other deities are installed in the fabric of the building exterior, on the slopes of the mythical mountains to which the temple form alludes; for example, Śiva as the supreme teacher, Śiva Dakṣiṇamūrti (pl.80), seated at Mount Kailasā, is represented in a prominent position on the south elevation of a temple sanctuary tower, so that he can face south as he looks down from his Himalayan abode. Brahmā occupies the north, and the west elevation is dominated by the great demonstration of Śiva's supremacy over his rival gods Brahmā and Viṣṇu in the *Liṅgobhavamūrti* myth. In this conceptualization, Śiva manifests himself to his challengers in anthropomorphic form, issuing from within a *liṅga*. Other deities are assigned to facades of the vestibule, which provides a bridge between the mundane and supreme worlds of man and god. At the Bṛhadiśvara temple, Tanjavur, the gods on the south facade are Bhikṣāṭana (Śiva as naked beggar), Naṭarāja and Gaṇapati, and on the north facade the gods are Ardhanārīśvara (Śiva's androgynous syncretic form), Gaṅgādhara (Śiva as protector of the river Ganges) and Durgā.[5] Both the main vestibule and hall at Tanjavur, together with a number of secondary shrines, house fixed and portable images. At other temples supplementary shrines are integrated into the long processional galleries that enclose the main temple. This became a marked feature of later styles, as seen in the vast annexes that were added to Pallava and Cola temples in the Nayak period (pl.97).

Both the temple and the sculptures that are integral to its fabric must achieve a beauty that will entice the god to grace the temple with his or her presence. The importance of a beautiful location for a temple is explicitly stated in the architectural literature: temples were to be sited 'where tanks full of sweet and transparent water thronged with birds, where forests and pleasure gardens abound... there the gods always remain and enjoy pleasure'.[6] Where these natural pleasures were absent, as in urban settings, tanks and flower gardens were to be man-made, to render the place beautiful and attractive to the gods. In reality, temples range from humble rock shelters to temple-cities built by emperors at the height of their wealth and power – both can impress the deity equally. As the *bhakti* literature – poems of personal devotion – of medieval south India makes clear, the body of the devotee can also serve as the god's abode, a 'living temple'. The tenth-century Śaiva saint (*nāyaṉmār*) Basavanna evoked this original concept of the human body as the highest abode for worship:

The rich
Will make temples for Śiva
What shall I,
A poor man,
do?

My legs are pillars,
The body the shrine,
The head the cupola
of gold.

Listen, O lord of the meeting rivers,
Things standing shall fall,
But the moving ever shall stay.[7]

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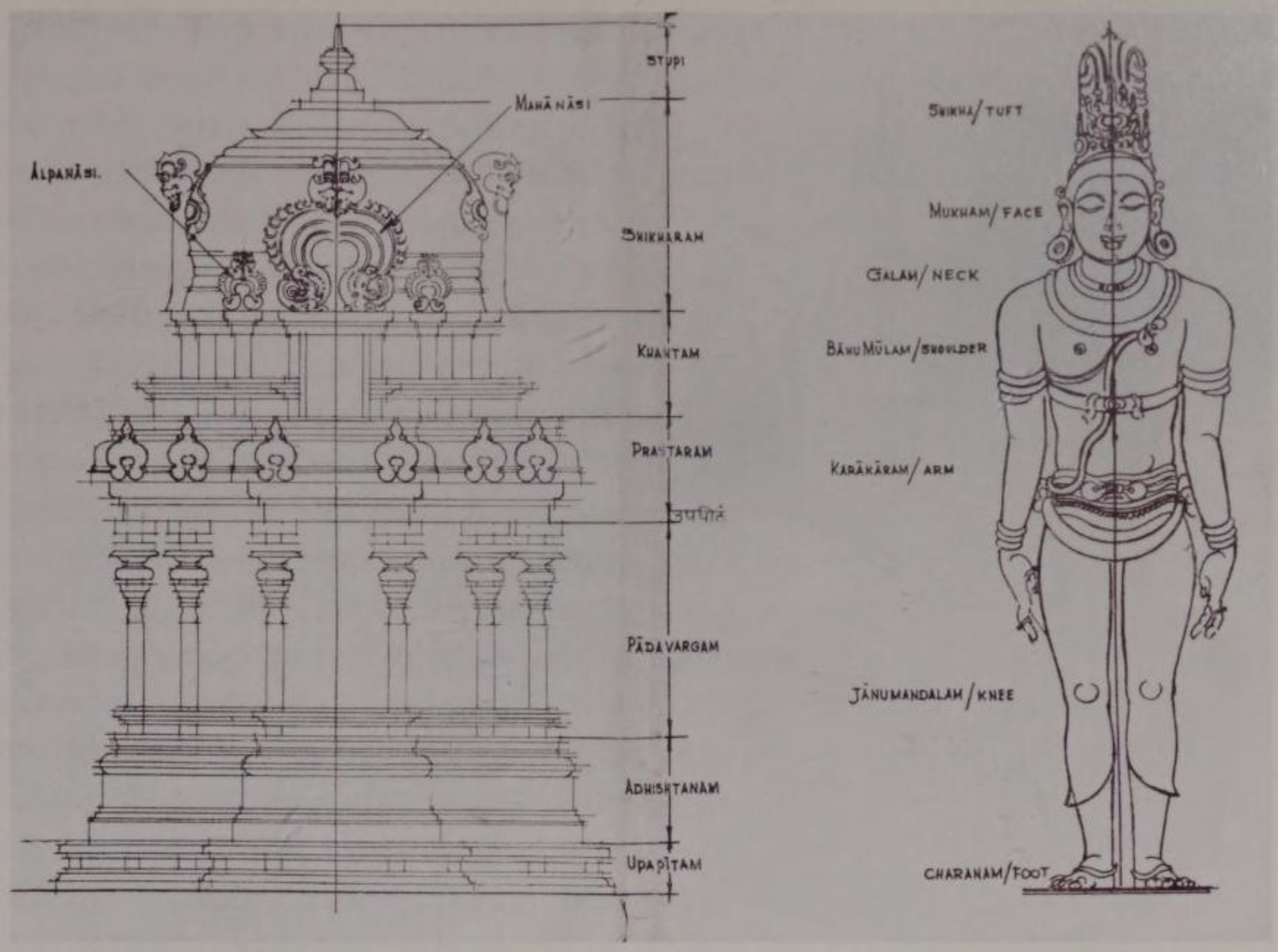
▶ Elevation of a south Indian Dravidian-style temple *vimāna* and the relationship of its parts to the human body. Line drawing courtesy Ananthacharya Indological Research Institute, Mumbai



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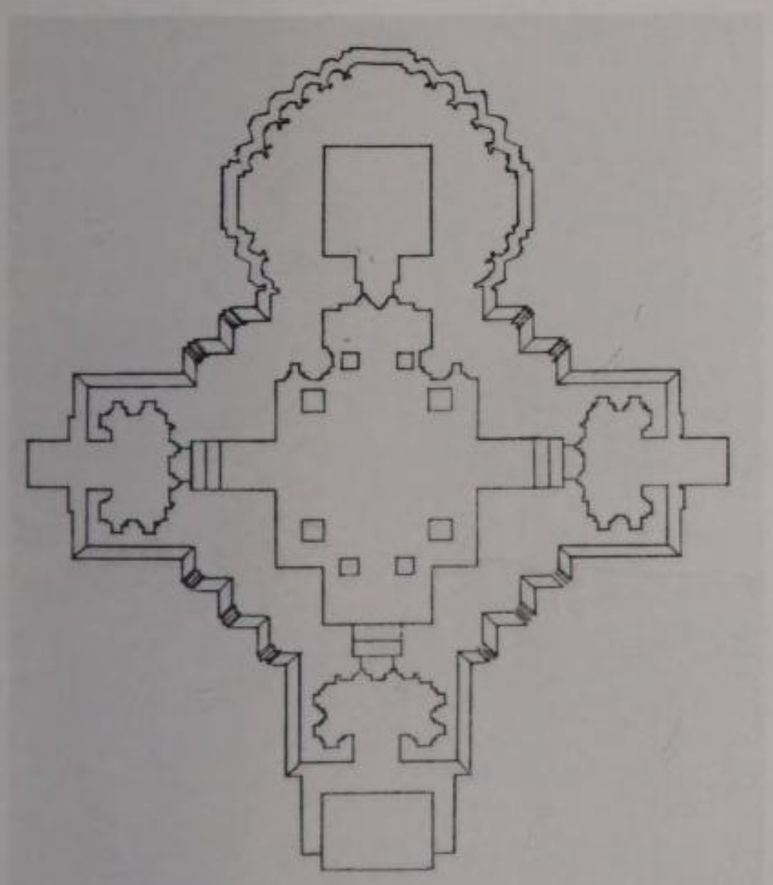
◀ Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa as the Universal Cosmology (Viśvarūpa). This form is inspired by Puruṣa and is evoked by Vaiṣṇavas to emphasize their vision of Viṣṇu as the embodiment of all things manifest, and hence universal saviour of the world. Jaipur school, early 19th century. Watercolour on paper. 38.5 x 28 cm. V&A: IS.33–2006. Given by Mrs Gerard Clark

77

▼ Ground plan of the Nilakantesvara temple, 11th century, Udayapur, Gwalior



The poet is juxtaposing the permanence of a devotee's love for his god with the impermanence of a temple. There is also a clear allusion to the *Puruṣa* concept in this imagery, and the metaphor the human form provides for the built temple. The poet-saint also values the 'moving' and therefore living devotee who carries god in his heart more than the static and inanimate idol or temple. The veneration extended to those wholly surrendered to their god meant that they were seen as a living embodiment of the god himself, his agent or vehicle. In this sense those holy men and women who had renounced all attachments to the material world were venerated as god incarnate – someone in whom god had chosen to manifest himself – and were approached with reverence. On occasions, such holy persons dressed as portable shrines, so they appeared to the populace as movable living temples (pl.81). The poet-saints and those who followed their way had no need of either temples or sculpted images. But this was the voice of the outsider, often the low caste and the poor.

For the populace at large, the magnificence and beauty of a temple was a source of deep spiritual comfort and sanctuary. For the patron, most typically the monarch, much more was at stake – the acquisition of religious merit (*puṇya*). In order to ensure that the spiritual benefit accrued to him alone, the donor needed to pay well all those employed in this meritorious venture, from the labourers who laid the stones and bricks, to the master craftsmen who carved them and the architects who designed and directed the construction.[8] Patrons of religious monuments of all faiths, Hindu, Buddhist and Jain alike, shared this preoccupation. The benefits of *puṇya* were understood to function at both a personal level, ensuring beneficial rebirth, or *mokṣa*, liberation from the cycle of rebirths for Buddhists and Jains, and at a political level, offering material benefit to the state through the presiding deity's grace. The close identification of a ruler with his temple was on occasions made explicit, as witnessed in some foundation inscriptions in south India. Kailasānatha temple, the pride of the Pallava's capital city, was originally named in its foundation inscription as Rājasimhesvara, after its patron, the Pallava king Rājasiṁha (pl.82):

> May Śiva be permanently present in this temple, Rājasiṁheśvara, built of stone, which rises as if reaching the clouds, which surpasses Kailasā in its beauty and which was built by Rājasiṁha, the righteous king of kings, who forced all quarters to obey his commands and who proved a king-lion to the elephants of his opponents.[9]

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▲ A Śaiva *riṣi*, seated in a relaxed meditative posture, wearing as necklace, headband and armbands the *rudraksa* beads sacred to Śiva. He also holds a bead rosary in his right hand, and is supported by a decorated meditation strap (*yogapaṭṭa*). Tamilnadu, 18th century, Nayak period. Granite. Height 45 cm. V&A: IS.252–1953

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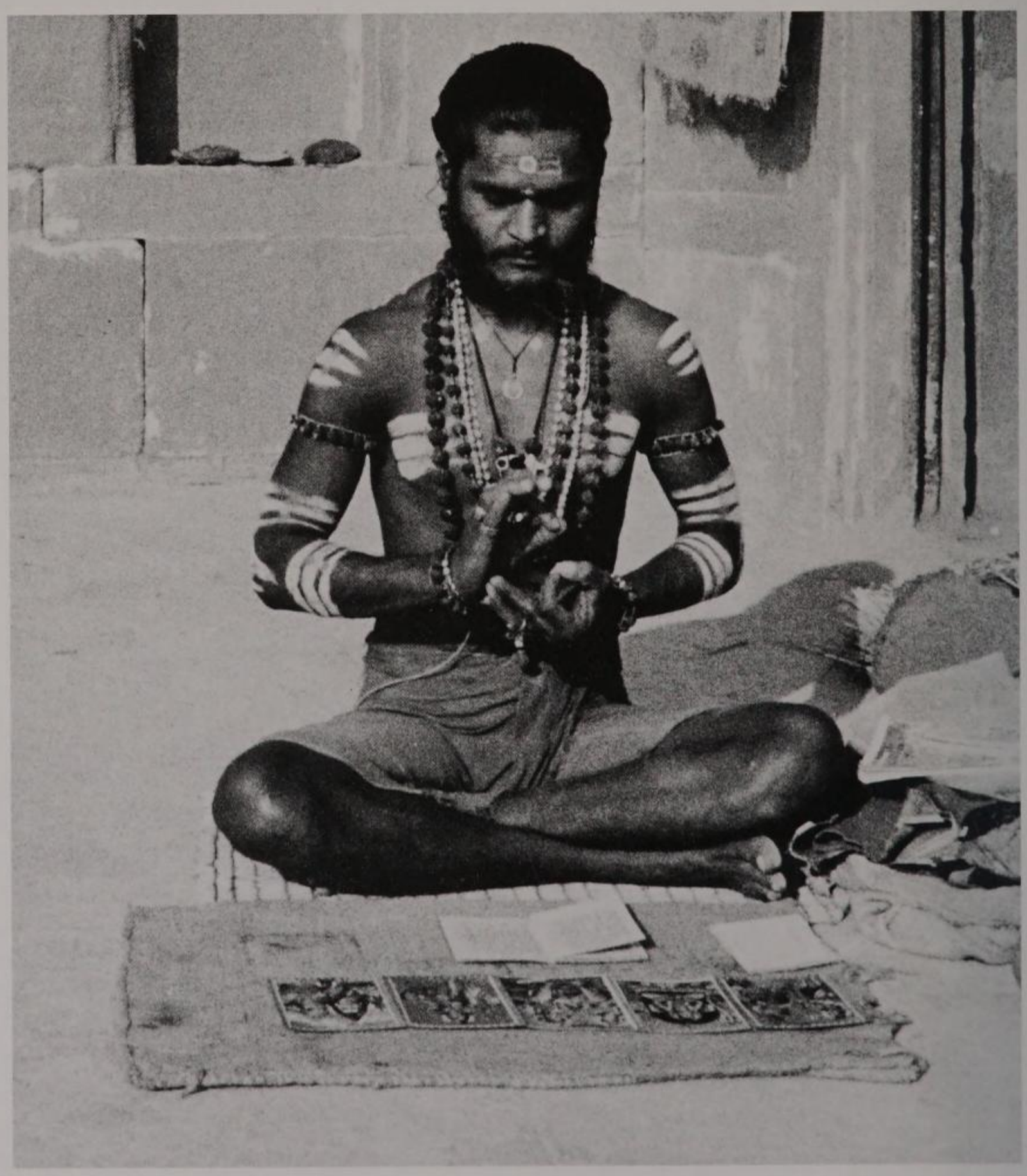
▶ *Riṣi*, with the markings of a follower of Śiva, reciting *mantras* (sacred syllables), and invoking *yantras* (magical diagrams) through the use of *mudrās* (ritually potent hand gestures). In these rituals, his body serves as his 'temple'. Photograph Frank Monaco. V&A: IS. 119-2006. Given by Frank Monaco

This royal declaration makes clear the imperial intent of the patronage, and is as much a celebration of the donor-king as of the god he is honouring. As early as the fifth century we have evidence of the close identification of rulers with their presiding deity. This is witnessed in the Eastern Vakataka (*c.*375–450) kingdom in the Nagpur district of Maharashtra. At Nagardhan and Hamlapuri, the area of their capital Nandivardhana, and Ramtek (old Ramagiri), a fortified hill complex which served as their religious centre, are a series of fifth-century temples dedicated to Viṣṇu as Narasiṁha, Viṣṇu's lion *avatāra*.[10] The cult image of Narasiṁha, represented in human form with a lion's head and seated in royal ease (*rājalīlāsana*), is one of the greatest sculptural expressions of supreme authority and power (pl.83) The conjunction of sculptural icons and associated royal inscriptions at Ramtek makes it clear that the royal cult of Narasiṁha served as an analogy for the king's power. The inscriptions conflate the god and king into a shared set of imagery, the deity as king and the king as a god (or god-like, the king-lion or lion-king). In this context royal ritual and religious ritual become indistinguishable.[11] In the Pallava world of southern India a similar process of divine identification by rulers was under way, manifest in the custom of a ruler assuming the name of his chosen tutelary deity, together with a long-standing tradition of identifying the king with Viṣṇu, married with Bhūdevī, the earth on which the king reigns.

In this context of ruler-deity identification, the building of major temples by



80

▲ Dakṣiṇāmūrti, the 'Lord who faces South', represents Śiva as the divine teacher of yoga, music, *jñāna* (higher knowledge), and all the arts and sciences. He is depicted as an ascetic – with uncut hair – seated in the 'heroic' (*virāsaṇa*) posture. With his lower right hand he makes the gesture of teaching in silence (*cinmudrā*). The rocky landscape upon which he sits is an allusion to his Himalayan retreat, where he instructs the holy men (*ṛiṣis*) in the secrets of the *śāstras*. Images of Dakṣiṇāmūrti came to occupy a position on the south wall of the central shrine of medieval Hindu temples. 13th century, late Cola period. Granite. Height 97.8 cm. V&A: IS.41–1966

victorious monarchs assumed a special significance. The builder of the great temple was exercising power by facilitating ritual activity, and the god was supporting the monarch's reign by rewarding him with *puṇya* (religious merit) thereby maintaining *dharma* (order), ensuring political stability and prosperity. This was a partnership acted out by the supreme monarchs of the two realms (pl.84).

A ruler who engendered god's grace was seen as a benign and beneficent one, bringing spiritual benefit to the whole community, from the king himself to the wandering mendicant. In turn, much of the power exercised by a king was derived from his support of public worship, made visible through ritual gift-giving (*dana*) on a grand scale, and recorded in lengthy and effusive inscriptions, prominently visible on the temple. This dimension of royal patronage is central to understanding the motivation behind the innumerable building programmes undertaken throughout the Indian subcontinent from the early medieval period onwards.

Ritual gift-giving has its origins in the Vedic period as a tribal method of redistribution of wealth within a community, to secure political loyalty and social harmony. By the historical period it had acquired moral overtones and the donors' spiritual intentions came to be valued. The *Mahābhārata* makes clear that *dana* could be more than the redistribution of wealth, and had evolved to include both acts of charity and the donation of facilities beneficial to the community, such as the building of temples, tanks, gardens and wells.[12]

Patrons of major temples, usually royal, invariably recorded their benefaction in a dedication inscription, which recorded not only the inauguration of the temple, but also the endowments made for its upkeep, including the gifting of lands and the services of named villages. The commissioning of new religious images, either as replacements for damaged or stolen ones, or as additional processional icons, was an especially noteworthy event. Rājarāja Cola's (985–1014) Tanjavur temple inscriptions provide a detailed record of the royal donations made to the temple, including sixty-four copper alloy processional images and accompanying sets of gold jewellery for adorning them.[13] These are the gifts of the king and his family, including his queens, his sister Kundavai and his grand-aunt, Sembiyan Mahādevī, a renowned donor in her own right.

Form

The Indian temple employed universally applied principles of construction. Fundamental was the use of post, beam and corbel construction techniques that created styles marked by great exterior mass and small, poorly lit interior spaces. The limited capacity of stone to span and cantilever defined the scale of the inner spaces generated. Unlike the European and Islamic medieval architectural traditions, Indian temple architecture remained defined, and confined, by the structural limits of its building materials. Engineered structural solutions, such as the arch or vault, were not employed. Clearly it was resolved early in the evolution of the temple that the post-and-beam built forms best served the prevailing needs. The sheer mass of the Indian temple continues to resonate with memories of the rock-cut shrine, its cave-like interior enveloped by a great assembly of cut stone.

The skin of the temple – the sheath (*kosa*) of masonry enveloping the sanctuary – was given its form and embellishment by one prevailing idea: that the temple was the deity's temporary heavenly abode on earth. It was therefore conceived and modelled on the concept of the heavenly-cosmic mountain. This schema is visible in the temple's plan and its elevation, both of which embody

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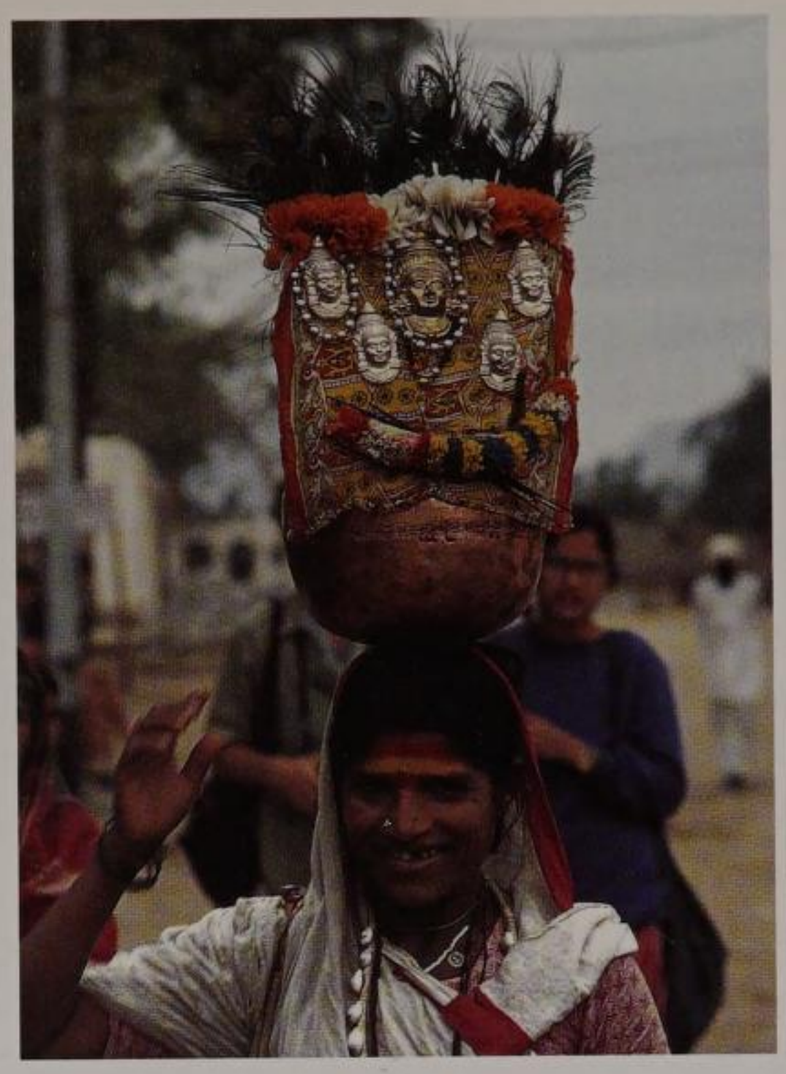
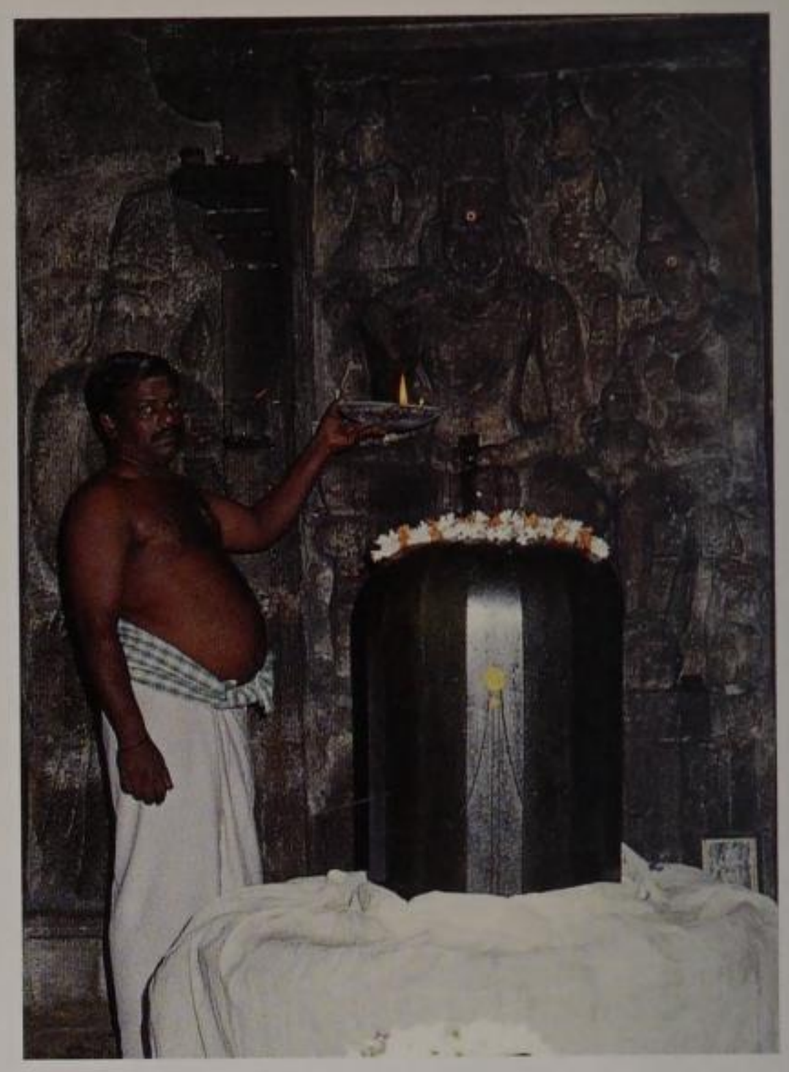
▶ A living shrine. A female devotee (*bhakta*) wearing a portable shrine on her head, adorned with silver repoussé plaques of her lord. Rural Karnataka. Photograph by the author, 1981



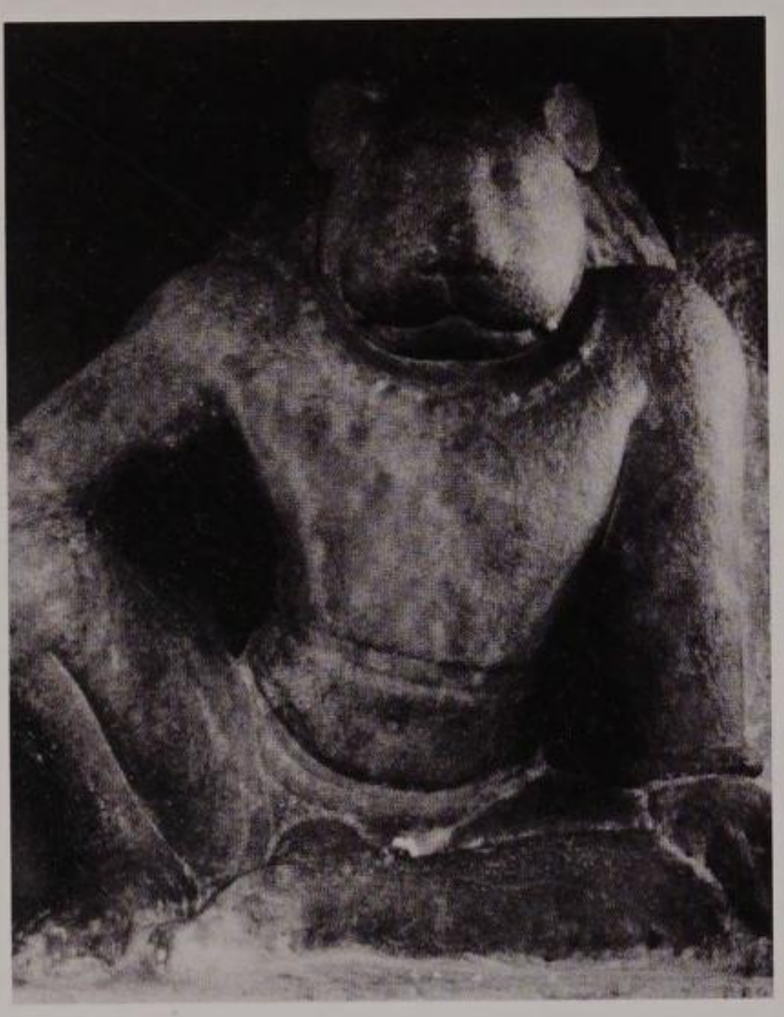
82

▶ A priest with lamp performing a private *āratī pūjā* at the Kailasanatha temple, Kanchipuram, Tamilnadu. On the interior wall is a large-scale relief sculpture of Somāskanda, the divine family of Śiva. This subject was a regular feature of Pallava temple sanctuaries – it also appears in the Shore temple at Mamallapuram – but lapsed in the Cola period, when it was replaced by processional icons. Early 8th century, Pallava period. Photograph by the author, 1995



83

▼ Narasiṁha, the man-lion *avatār* of Viṣṇu. In situ, Kevala Narasiṁha temple, Ramtek (Ramagiri), near Nagpur, Madhya Pradesh. 5th century, Vakataka period. American Institute of Indian Studies



mountain symbolism. The plan is essentially a stepped square or diamond, embodying piled up rock imagery in its overlapping and expanding forms; in elevation the silhouette of the tower is repeatedly replicated, with each tower being larger than the last. The building blocks of the design were replicated until the final form was achieved. Much of the *śāstric* texts concern measurements and the proportions of parts, so ensuring a uniformly high standard of symmetry and harmony in temple construction. The effect was to create a structure that had embedded in its forms the possibility of infinite replication – what better device to evoke a sense of the universe? The development of Indian temple design was henceforth largely concerned with the ways in which this multiplication and elaboration could be achieved (pls.86–89).

Sculpture is integral to the form and meaning of the temple and is not merely surface adornment. It has an organic presence, growing out of the very fabric and body of the temple. The gods typically occupy elevated places, and in Indian mythology the Himalayas assume this role as the abode of the gods. The multiplying forms of the tower, which envelops and protects the image chamber within, evoke the sacred mountain. Located at the temple's heart is the *garbhagṛha* (womb chamber), recalling in its dark, inner recesses the mountain-cave imagery of earlier times. The cave chamber surmounted by the great mountain tower (*śikhara*) combines two very powerful sets of imagery that persist as the defining elements of the traditional Indian temple.

From the outset, a predilection for surface decoration resulted in the development of a strong tradition of sculptural embellishment. This began as relief panels enhanced with plaster and naturalistic painting, sited on both interior and exterior surfaces. Porches were much favoured for larger group compositions, a practice developed early in the context of rock-cut shrines, where the porch provided a viewing gallery. This was used to most dramatic effect in the Śiva reliefs at Elephanta in western India and the Durgā Cave at Mamallapuram in Tamilnadu. Increasing use was made of freestanding sculptures installed in niches on the exterior walls, arranged serially according to precisely codified schema dictating the order and directional orientation of each deity. There is nothing random or casual about these placements; rather, these icons are sited within a formal structure of hierarchically ordered spaces. These serve to define their place in the social order. This hierarchy of icons radiates out from the centre

of the temple, which resides in the cult icon in the *garbhagṛha*. In a Śaiva temple, this is the *liṅga*, from which all other forms emanate. The temple radiates in all directions – cardinal and transverse, as well as skywards, creating the pyramidal form of the Indian temple. The ascending exterior surface of the temple is populated with divinities according to this order. The *Mayamata*, the most complete medieval treatise on architecture, including the form of the temple, provides explicit instructions for the correct placement of deities, the number depending on the scale of temple being constructed:

> At each level of the temple [the architect] should place divinities in the cardinal directions, in due order. One should locate two door-guardians, Nandi and Mahākāla, to the east, Dakṣiṇāmūrti to the south, Viṣṇu or the Liṅgodbhava to the west, and Brahmā to the north...[14]

This was the order prevailing in the early Cola period, and it accords well with south Indian temples of the tenth and eleventh centuries. The configurations changed over time in response to the prevailing hierarchy of deities. The eleventh-century *Vāstuśāstra* of *Viśvakarma* sets out where and in what order the gods should be arrayed: 'Let the five divinities – Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Rudra, Iśvara [Maheśa] and Sadāśiva – live in each *urah-srnaga* on each *bhadrā* offset.' That is, each icon in turn is to be installed on one of the main architectural projections on the *śikhara*. This hierarchy, with the three forms of Śiva taking clear precedent, is in accordance with the Śaiva Siddhānta system.[15] It represents levels of comprehending Śiva, graded from the sublime to the mundane. They proceed from the highest manifestation, that of the mind-image of god carried by the devotee in his heart, through the abstracted Sadāśiva represented by the emblematic *liṅga*, to Maheśa as the anthropological form of Śiva. These levels of manifestation follow the medieval Śaiva *āgamas*, which speak of a three-fold unfolding, from the transcendent to the material.[16] The single-faced *ekamukhaliṅga* (pl.158) and the four-faced *caturmukhaliṅga* are expressions of the Sadāśiva, between formlessness and material representation. The latter level is seen in the sculptural icon, which serves as a meeting place for god and his devotee. Other devotees – *sādhus*, for example – generally feel no need for such mundane icons and aspire to a higher, more abstract level of union with god.

Indian temples evolved from a simple square or rectangular form into a highly complex structure, with regional variations emerging early in their development. The basic square and rectangular temple sanctuary with pillared porch emerged in both rock-cut and masonry-built form, as witnessed at such rock-cut sites as Badami (second half of the sixth century) and Elephanta (mid- to late sixth century), and in built structures at Bhitargaon (sixth century) and Aihole (Meguti temple, 634 CE). A variant temple plan belonging to the early period is the apsidal temple, such as the eighth-century Durgā temple at Aihole, which added a circular end to a rectangular plan. This relates to an early tradition which has survived in the archaeological record: an apsidal temple dedicated to *nāgas* was erected at Mathura around 100 CE, and a circular one at Rajgir (Bihar) has its lowest foundations dating back to at least the second century CE. Moreover, the apsidal Buddhist shrine named *chaityagriha* or 'house of the *chaitya*' included a *chaitya* or *stūpa* as an object of veneration, which imposed its circular ground plan on the interior space housing it. Numerous examples of these were built in Andhra Pradesh, and rock cut at the Buddhist sites of Maharasthra.

The Sanskrit *Vāstuśāstra* texts distinguish a northern (Nāgara) style from that of the south (Drāvida or Dravidian). The most complete of these texts are the *Mayamatam* and *Manosara*, and each is assumed to embody earlier treatises on

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▼ **Portrait of King Narasiṁha I (1238-64), the builder of the Sun Temple at Konarak, Orissa, receiving spiritual instruction from his chief priest, seated to the right. The figures are treated hierarchically, with the priest represented at a larger scale to define the correct guru-pupil relationship. Mid-13th century, Eastern Ganga period. Black shale. Height 78.5 cm. V&A: 938 IS**

85

▼ Presumed portrait of the architect – holding a rule and discus – of the Hoysalesvara temple, Halebid, Karnataka, represented in a prominent position on the temple exterior. Mid-12th century, Hoysala period. Photograph by the author, 1981

86

▶ Parasurāmeśvara temple, Bhuvanesvar. The most complete early expression of the eastern Indian Nāgara style with tapering *śikhara*. Orissa. Late 6th–early 7th century. Photograph by the author, 1981

the subject of architecture, both sacred and secular. They do not confine themselves exclusively to Hindu temples – Buddhist and Jain buildings are also cited. The earliest temple architecture of north and south India seems to have been guided by shared architectural principles, but over time increasingly different systems of measurements and forms were employed. Elements such as the fruit-shaped capping stone (*āmalaka*), a signature motif of the Nāgara style, were conspicuously absent in the south. The ancient city gateway (*gopura*) acquired a special significance in the Dravidian temple scheme, coming to outshine the sanctuary in its architectural splendour, an importance it never attained in the north. The systems for classifying the component parts of architectural elements – pillars, capitals, bases and pedestals – diverged, assuming different names and measurements. Such differences translated over time into distinctive regional architectural styles.

The textual evidence suggests that the northern and southern temple styles had become distinct from around the sixth century. In terms of form, they are most readily distinguished by the treatment of the superstructure placed directly over the sanctuary: the Nāgara style has a tall spire (*śikhara*), tapering and sometimes swelling, whereas the Dravidian temple has a lower superstructure of tiered pyramidal form. Over the centuries these respective features became more exaggerated, the *śikhara* becoming taller and grander, and the Dravidian *vimāna* often shrinking in scale, as if in awe of the great towering gateways (*gopura*). In both traditions the sanctuary and tower component is intended to evoke the imagery of a multi-storied heavenly palace. This palace of the divine is in turn made of multiple replications of smaller heavenly palaces, used as the building blocks of the whole. Multiplication and repetition are key elements in the expression of form in the Hindu temple. The elements are organic in the sense that they multiply and reveal themselves, one form giving birth to the next in a chain reaction. Thus the temple is built on fundamental Indian concepts of the infinite in the finite, and the cyclical process of creation, dissolution and recreation of forms.

By the seventh–eighth centuries we witness the emergence of the mature Nāgara style with the gradual extension of the porch into a long ante-room with a porch, of which the Malegitti Shivalay temple at Badami and the Virupaksha temple at Pattadakal are superb examples. In eastern India this phase is

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▶ Model of the Mahabodhi temple, Bodhgaya. This Buddhist shrine has assumed the form of a Hindu Nāgara-style temple, with sanctum, porch and tower. 12th century, Pala period. Black basalt. Height 12 cm. V&A: IS.21–1986

represented by the remarkably mature style of the eighth-century Parasurāmeśvara temple in Bhuvanesvar, Orissa (pl.86). Here the elaboration of models has advanced extremely quickly, producing some of the most advanced temples of the period. The northern style is also witnessed by a Buddhist shrine, the Mahabodhi, which had assumed, by the twelfth century, the essential elements of a Hindu temple (pl.87). The most elaborate expression of this style is perhaps the Kaṇḍarīya Mahādeo temple built by the Chandella rulers at Khajuraho (pl.88).

In southern India the mid-seventh-century rock-cut and monolithic temples of Mamallapuram both look back to earlier timber and thatch buildings in their architectural vocabulary. Perhaps the most 'progressive' shrine – in that it anticipated in style stone structural monuments of fifty years later – is the Dharmarāja shrine (pl.89). The Shore temple at Mamallapuram and the Kailāsānatha temple at Kanchipuram, both probably built under the reign and patronage of the Pallava ruler Narasiṁhavarman II (Rājasiṁha) in the early eighth century, are anticipated by the Dhararāja shrine. This is seen in the symmetrical stacking up of repeated elements, notably in the use of barrel-vaulted and cupola roofing elements.

These temples were built as the spiritual centres of the expanding temple towns

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▶ Kaṇḍarīya Mahādeo temple, Khajuraho, Madya Pradesh. Perhaps the grandest of over thirty-five substantial temples built at the capital of the Candella dynasty, this temple represents the climax of the mature Nāgara style of temple architecture, *c.*1000, Candella period. V&A SSEA Archive

of medieval south India. Kanchipuram served as the capital of the Pallava dynasty, and Mamallapuram as its port for international trade. The Kailāsānatha temple, built around 700–728, marks a beginning of the mature Dravidian temple architecture and sets down the essential elements of the south Indian temple type. This temple is a showcase of inspired sculptural and painted mural decoration. The large sculptural panels that fill the exterior of the sanctuary walls are arguably the greatest relief sculptures of their generation, and the minor shrines that indent the inner surface of the enclosure wall still preserve, in their inner recesses, the finest Pallava painting to have survived (pl.51). Together, they represent the grandest visual exposition of Śiva's exploits in early south India, and are only matched in the north by the great suite of narrative reliefs at Elephanta. The model provided by the Dharmarāja shrine at Mamallapuram and the Kailāsānatha temple at Kanchipuram lived on in the medieval south Indian temple, of which Tinnevelly is typical (pl.90).

Function

The temple's function as a temporary residence for the god had two elements of worship embodied in it, reflecting the needs of both the deity and the devotee. The temple replicated in its form and ornamentation the heavenly abode of the deity to ensure that he might grace it with his presence. For the devotee, the temple housed the icon of the god, the medium through which prayers could be addressed and grace received. The temple offered the opportunity for direct communion between deity and devotee, the icon being the mechanism for divine blessing.

The inner spaces of even the largest Hindu temple remain relatively small. The chief image, appropriately scaled, is installed here. It is the role of Brahman priests to persuade the divinity, through the enactment of worship (*pūjā*), to grace the temple with his presence. The temple's hereditary priests attend to the god's daily needs and regulate access to the image chamber. Devotees are rarely permitted to

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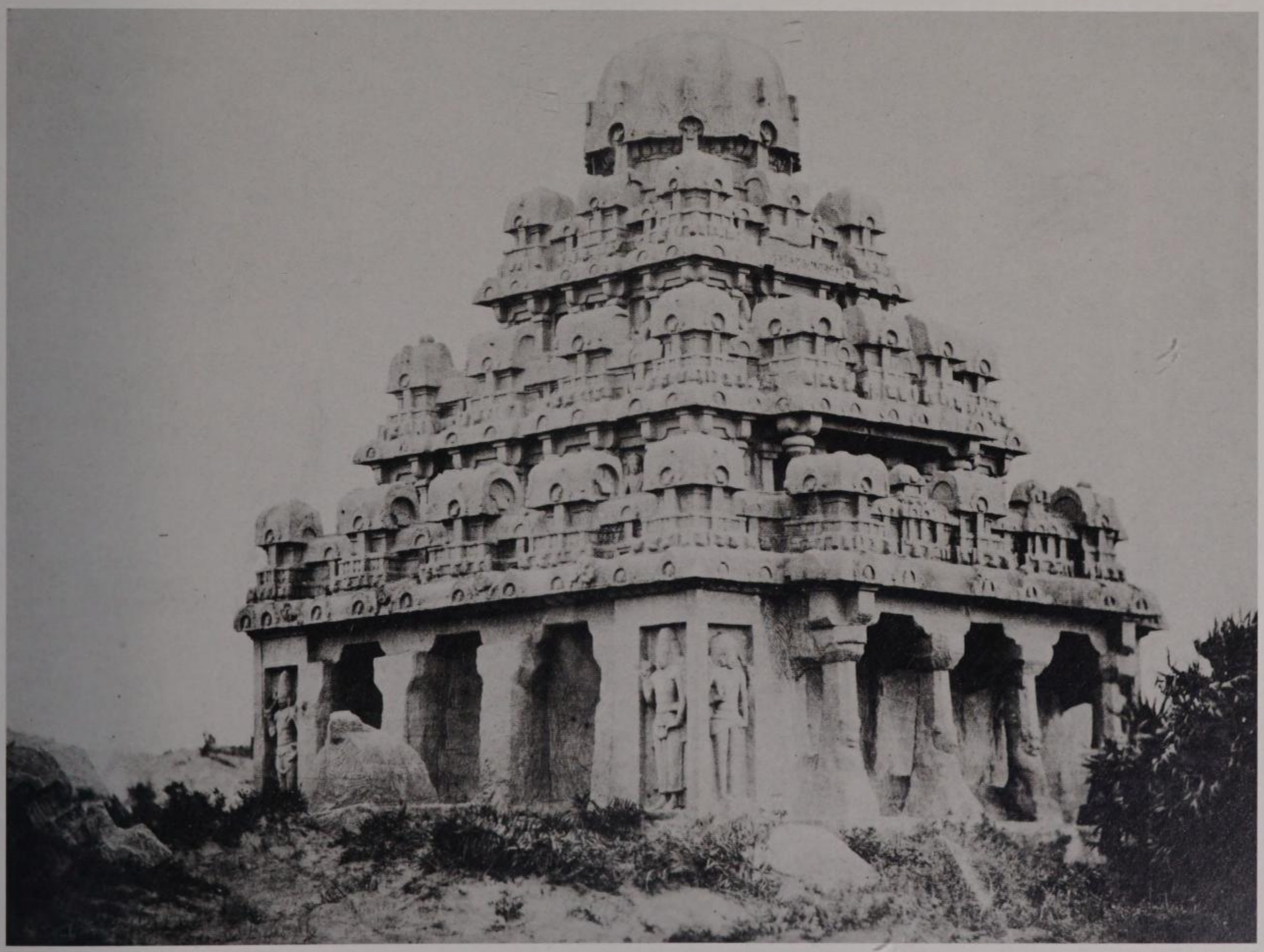
▼ **Monolithic rock-cut temple, known as the 'Dharmarāja ratha'. Freestanding rock-cut shrines, such as those at Mamallapuram, represent a staging-point in the development from rock-cut cave shrine to the structural temple; they also replicate features from earlier secular wooden architecture. Mamallapuram, Tamilnadu. 7th–8th century, Pallava era. V&A SSEA Archive**

enter the chamber itself, but rather are permitted to pause and receive a blessing at the doorway that affords a brief sight of the image (*mūrti*) of the god. The granting of *darśana*, the opportunity to see one's god, is a privilege carefully regulated by the priests, and devotees queue patiently at the appointed hour, when the sanctum's silver or golden doors are opened for the performance of *pūjā*.

Great numbers of devotees attend these temples for worship. A pillared hall on the east axis of the temple, the *ardhamaṇḍapa*, provides space for worshippers to assemble and acclimatize to the darkness of the temple interior. This ante-chamber can be small or, as in the case of many south Indian temples, it may be a vast hall that connects to covered passageways which envelop the temple on all sides. It is here that much of the daily life of the temple is conducted. The faithful assemble and prepare themselves for their personal encounter with their god, visiting the many subsidiary shrines in acts of private prayer or to commission the attending Brahman priest to perform a *pūjā* on their behalf. Young Brahman boys receive their tuition in these galleries, and the vendors of devotional paraphernalia are often allowed to conduct their business there.

In Śaivite temples this hall usually also houses the processional images of the gods. These are small-scale metal sculptures that are empowered through special rites to act on behalf of the immovable images installed permanently in the temple. Śiva assumes a human manifestation and is accompanied by his



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◀ Temple tank at Tinnevelly, Tamilnadu, used for the annual floating festival (*teppotsava*) in which the portable icon is displayed on a floating pontoon drawn around the tank. Photograph by Captain Edmund Lyon, *c.*1860s. V&A SSEA Archive

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◀ A family paying homage to Nandi, before proceeding to the temple sanctuary for *darśana*, Ekambaresvara temple, Kanchipuram, Tamilnadu, 1992. Photograph by Frank Monaco.
V&A: IS. 211-2006. Given by Frank Monaco

wife Pārvatī and other members of his family. In Vaiṣṇava temples, these processional images are typically installed in individual temple shrines within the temple grounds, each dedicated to a different deity. Here they are the ready focus of worship by devotees who visit each in turn, so circumambulating the main temple and cult image in the process.

Immediately beyond the temple's eastern porch is a freestanding pillared hall (*maṇḍapa*), housing in a Śaiva temple a seated Nandi, Śiva's calf-bull vehicle (*vāhana*) (pls.91–2).[17] Often a smaller scale Nandi, in stone or metal, will also be present immediately at the entrance doorway to the sanctuary (pl.93). In Vaiṣṇava temples this spot is marked by a pillar (*stambha*), sometimes surmounted by Viṣṇu's sacred vehicle, Garuḍa (*Garuḍastamba*), seen clearly in the cloth painting of the Jagannatha temple in Puri (pl.95), more often by a flag symbol (*dhvajastambha*). This pillar is usually freestanding, but can sometimes be found to project through the ceiling of a *maṇḍapa*. Further freestanding pillared halls are built, depending on the prosperity of the temple, as venues for the performance of temple dancers (*devadāsī*) and musicians. Others are erected to house the processional vehicles (*rathas*) used during the temple festival (see Chapter 4). The Vithala temple at Hampi (fifteenth century) is a particularly elaborate complex, with a large fifty-six-pillared hall (*maṇḍapa*) for performances and another expressly for re-enacting the wedding ceremony of the gods, as well as a stone and brick *ratha* complete with stone wheels, replicating the mobile temples used for festival processions. On occasions, other *maṇḍapas* are built beyond the temple perimeter to provide a resting place for the gods (and devotees) during the extended processions undertaken during the annual temple festivals. Many of these are temporary structures, hastily erected in bamboo and roofed with palm leaves, textiles or, more commonly today, sheet iron. Others are grand stone structures, one of the most spectacular examples being the Pudu

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▼ Nandi, Śiva's calf-bull vehicle, whose name means 'joyfulness', assumed the role of Śiva's most devoted worshipper. He alone is privileged to face the lord's sanctuary and is regularly honoured by devotees with flowers and incense. Worshippers often touch Nandi to imbibe his profound devotion, before proceeding to the main temple sanctuary. Karnataka or Andhra Pradesh. 17th century. Serpentine stone. Height 64 cm.
V&A: IS.73–1990

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▲ Illustrated palm-leaf manuscript depicting a woman devotee honouring Śiva, having just decorated the *liṅga* with flowers. Orissa. 19th century. Palm leaf, 4.8 x 40.6 cm. V&A: IS.157–1993

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▶ A portrait of a female devotee and donor, her hands raised in veneration (*añjali*). She is identified by inscription as 'the lady Tiru Nilakanta of Tiruvarur', in Tanjavur District, Tamilnadu. Such a portrait would only be commissioned to accompany – and venerate – a religious donation, be it an icon or shrine. As she is identified, unusually in Tamil culture, by association with her husband, Tiru Nilakanda, in all likelihood she originally accompanied a portrait sculpture of him. 17th century, Nayak period. Copper alloy. Height 38 cm. V&A: IS.I–1951

Maṇḍapa, built by Tirumala Nayak (r.1623–59) around 1630, beyond the west gate of the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple at Madurai (pl.98).[18]

It is customary for temples to be prominently situated, high on a hill or near to some impressive natural feature. In many cases, the surrounding landscape was associated with a specific event in the Purāṇic literature, thus imbuing the location with mythological significance and so serving to attract pilgrims. These sites became *tīrthas*, places of pilgrimage, the visiting of which ensured great spiritual and material benefit for the devotee. A classic example of this type of temple is Tirupati, in southern Andhra Pradesh, dedicated to Lord Viṣṇu, one of the largest temple complexes in the subcontinent and certainly today the wealthiest. Tirupati's importance in the sacred geography of Hindu India lies in its surrounding hills being said to represent the seven hoods of the king of serpents, Ādiśeṣa, upon whose coils – emblematic of limitless time – Viṣṇu entered into his cosmic sleep. In all, 108 sites are deemed holy in the Vaiṣṇava sacred geography of India, all worthy of being visited by devout pilgrims in their lifetimes. The flow of pilgrims visiting Tirupati annually is today estimated to be in excess of four million, ensuring that this temple is the richest temple in India, with unmeasured wealth.[19]

In the second half of the first millennium we witness developments in urban planning that placed the temple at the axial centre of the town or city. This represented a significant reorientation in the organization of urban space from the preceding model, in which the focus of economic and social life was the fortified town, as recorded most vividly in the reliefs of Bharhut and the murals of Ajanta, and as described in the poetic writings of Kalidasa, the great fourth- or fifth-century dramatist.

The temple town was an urban complex with a large temple at its centre, defining the orientation of streets and directing the flow of traffic to itself. The temple was increasingly assuming a role that went beyond meeting the spiritual needs of its community, and placed itself at the economic and social centre of the town. The medieval temple became more than a place solely devoted to the performance of *pūjās*, though this was unquestionably its core function.

As the wealthiest institutions within their communities, temples soon assumed other non-religious functions critical to the prosperity and happiness of

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◀ The Rāja of Puri worshipping at the Jagannātha temple, Puri, Orissa. Inscribed and dated equivalent to 1670, with Nepalese royal donor portraits, presumably added in Bhaktapur, Kathmandu Valley. Gouache on cloth. 115 x 82 cm. V&A: IS.64–1985

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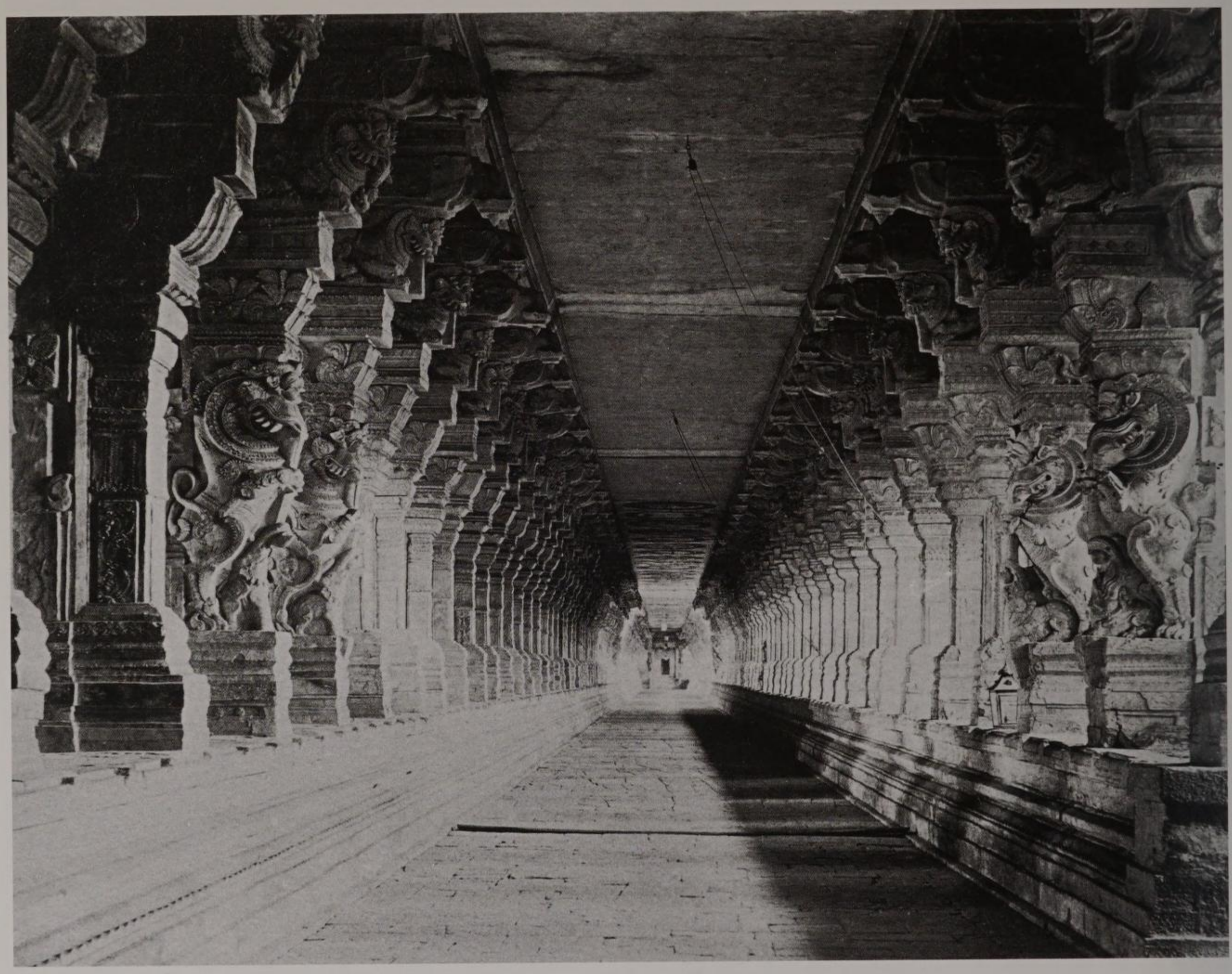
▼ The Jagannātha *ratha* during the annual festival procession at Puri, Orissa in 1822, being observed by an officer of the East India Company and his wife, from a *howdah*. The officer is in all probability the British Commissioner Andrew Stirling, who published in that year the first detailed account of Orissa in English, in *Asiatic Researches*, the journal of the recently founded Asiatic Society of Bengal in Calcutta. Company painting, dated 1822. Watercolour on paper. 46.5 x 67.5 cm. V&A: IS.75–1959

their communities. They acted as a host to an array of community activities, from weddings to theatrical and musical performances. As banks they served as the principal moneylenders, and as large institutions as well as major landowners, they were significant employers. Inscriptions at Rājarāja's Bṛhadiśvara temple record that this great temple was a major source of employment, having temple administrators, a chief accountant ('treasurer') and a staff of clerks to manage its complex finances, and a large staff of priests and their families, astrologers, dancers, musicians, goldsmiths, carpenters, washer men, guards and caretakers. Other donations, mostly in the form of land endowments, are recorded, along with careful instructions regarding how these funds were to be spent. They took the form of expenditure on new devotional images, ritual utensils and temple jewellery for the gods, on rice for the priests and palm oil for the temple lamps, and even on the camphor for burning during *pūjās* and the *khus khus* roots needed for scenting the water for bathing the gods; it was all meticulously itemized and recorded.[20] The importance of the Bṛhadiśvara temple to its patron cannot be exaggerated. This temple absorbed the bulk of the wealth generated as spoils of the wars of territorial expansion relentlessly undertaken by Rājarāja throughout his reign (985–1014). It was intended to give expression to, and serve as a permanent record of, his long and successful reign.

Rājarāja's instruction that four hundred *devadāsī* (temple dancers with ritual responsibilities) be summoned from temples across the Cola-maṇḍala to Tanjavur, was a masterful act of political symbolism. By recruiting his temple dancers in this way, and by recording in a lengthy inscription each *devadāsī* by name and temple of origin, Rājarāja proclaimed to all the geographical extent of his state, significantly expanded under his reign, and the reality of his authority



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◀ Corridor of the enclosure *maṇḍapa*, Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple, Madurai, Tamilnadu. Photograph by Captain Edmund Lyon, 1860s. V&A SSEA Archive

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▼ Model of a section of Tirumala Nayak's *Pudu Maṇḍapa*, Mīnākṣī temple complex, Madurai, Tamilnadu. The central pier has the portrait of the Nayak king and his queens, patrons of the hall. Model commissioned by Adam Blackader, a British surgeon stationed at Madurai in the 1780s, and presented to the Society of Antiquaries in London in 1789, together with Blackader's report, read on his behalf by Sir Joseph Bankes. *c.*1780–9. Copper alloy. Height 32 cm. V&A: 98-98d–1870. Given by J. Heywood Hawkins

over it. This gesture was both religiously auspicious and politically potent.

The political symbolism of the great state-temple, such as the Bṛhadiśvara at Tanjavur, the Gaṇgā's Liṅgarāja temple at Bhuvanesvar and the Jagannātha temple at Puri, grew directly out of the close identification of the monarch with the tutelary deity. This was political power expressed in sacred architecture. The foundation of a new temple was seen as a particularly meritorious act. It was the single largest public expenditure, after warfare, a ruler would undertake in medieval India. It is a particularly well-documented aspect of medieval patronage precisely because virtually all major and most minor temples have foundation inscriptions carved into the fabric of the building, ensuring their survival in situ. These eulogize the donor's acts of piety and *dana*, giving for spiritual benefit. Building a new temple made possible all subsequent acts of meritorious giving, as witnessed above.

Temple building was not only spiritually beneficial, but also a highly visible political action through which the patron could declare his achievements as a ruler, warrior, conqueror and protector of his people. The medieval urbanization of southern India, with the royal temple at its heart, was a remarkable phenomenon. It is in these temple towns that we can most vividly witness the strength of temple Hinduism, both in the temple itself, and in the surrounding streets that are enlivened by the deity's presence during festival processions.

Devotion and Temple Worship

4

The period from around the eighth to the thirteenth century may be regarded as the high period of large-scale and magnificent temple building in the Indian subcontinent. A dynamic process of cross-stimulation occurred, whereby ritual worship became increasingly performed in the temple context, and the overwhelming scale of the temples built encouraged the cultivation of further rituals appropriate to this setting. The description of temple ritual and devotion which follows is largely derived from the relevant *śāstric* literature and from contemporary observations of modern Hindu practices, mainly made in southern India. Historically, however, there is abundant evidence to indicate that the ritual culture that emerged, and which was over time systematized and codified into manuals of ritual practice, was widely shared by all indigenous faiths – Hindu, Jain and, to a lesser extent, Buddhist. They all engaged in the reciting of *mantras*, the ringing of bells, the burning of lamps, the offering of food and flowers, and a cycle of daily rituals designed to honour the deity.[1] Each had substantial temples or shrines where the presiding deity could be worshipped, and smaller scale bronze replica images that were intended for processional use, or installed in household shrines for private worship (pl.100).

Temple Hinduism provided a new organizational framework for public worship, with a hierarchy of deities, a large public space and a clearly defined priest class. Śiva and Viṣṇu emerged as the presiding deities, accompanied by their consorts, who assumed increasingly independent entities as the goddess (*devī*). Worship became highly structured, performed within the institutional environment of the temple. The temples were usually located in an urban setting, but a significant number of highly important temples were built in remote but auspicious locations and prospered through the activities of pilgrims.

New texts were needed to codify and direct devotional practices as they evolved in the context of temple worship. The *āgama śāstra* literature served as the detailed technical manuals prescribing the rituals to be enacted for these new religious practices. They explain the procedures to be followed appropriate to the chosen deity. Hence the Śaiva *āgamas* are invoked for the worship of Śiva, the Vaiṣṇava *āgamas* (often called *Saṁhitās*) for Viṣṇu, the Sakta *tantras* for the cult of Śiva's female personification or Śakti, and so on. The *āgama* tradition is most closely associated with Śaiva worship in south India, notably the Siddhānta school, and with Kashmir, also a Śiva stronghold. In the Vaiṣṇava tradition, the deity can appear in many forms, created by his own volition. These are ranked from a state of bliss (higher consciousness), to a state of tranquillity (motionless creation of the universe), divine appearances (*avatāra*), and inner images held within the devotee's heart, and finally to the creation of material – sculptural or pictorial – images (*arcā*). A similar hierarchy of revelation is understood in Śaivism, with Śiva's twenty-eight manifestations (*mūrti*) giving form to this most complex of gods.

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◀ **Śiva on his silver mount Nandi, garlanded and bejewelled, setting out through the temple gateway during the festival procession of the Svetavaneśvara temple, Tiruvenkadu, Tanjavur District, Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, April 1993.**

The *bhakti* saints speak in their devotional hymns of carrying an image of their god 'carved on their heart', repeatedly stressing that a *bhakti*'s body is his temple for god and that love and hymns serve as his offerings. The poet saint Appar wrote in the seventh century:

> The body is the temple
> the loving heart is the devotee.
> Truthfulness will do for ritual purity,
> the jewel of the mind is the adorned liṅga.
> With love as milk and ghee
> generously mixed with water,
> with hymns as oblation,
> let us offer worship
> as sacrifice to the Lord.[2]

Meditation on the god within represents a higher state of worship than the veneration of images. Nonetheless, the need was recognized early in the development of Indian religions that such levels of devotion were not for everyone, and that the use of images was a necessary aid for worship by the populace at large. The sculptural form is the most mundane level of consciousness of a god, in which an image created according to the *śāstric* rules serves as a temporary abode for the god. The essence of the lord resides within the image during worship, hence the image is deemed to represent the lord's actual presence. This need for pictorial representations proved as strong for Buddhists and Jains as for Hindus. As proposed in Chapter 1, there is strong evidence to suggest that the Jains and Buddhists pioneered the making of devotional images, and that this doctrinal innovation represented a significant part of their popular appeal.

The prescriptive literature intended to instruct the faithful in the practice of worship is to be found in the Hindu *āgamas* and *paddhatis* (ritual handbooks). The Buddhist's instructions are contained in the *vidhis*, and the Jains use a variety of sources, from the medieval *śrāvakacara* texts to popular handbooks in vernacular languages.[3] The antiquity of the Buddhist and Jain practices is uncertain. The Hindu ritual texts that survive are recensions largely assembled in the period spanning the eighth to the twelfth centuries, although they are based on an unbroken literary lineage that in its earlier forms was transmitted orally.

The Śaiva *āgama* texts are customarily divided into four parts (referred to as the 'feet', *pāda*):

1. *Jñāna/vidyāpāda*, knowledge or doctrine.
2. *Kriyapāda*, description of rites, rules for building temples and making images.
3. *Caryapāda*, directions for the proper conduct of life and individual behaviour.
4. *Yogapāda*, mental discipline and training leading to *mokṣa* (liberation).

It is part two, the *kriyapāda*, which is fundamental for the development of Hindu religious practice. This text defines the rituals to be performed and sets the rules for the making of images of deities and for the design and construction of the temples in which they are to be housed. For everyday use in a Hindu temple, a priest would normally only need to refer to the *kriyapāda* text, which served as his liturgical compendium. This provided him with the programme of daily worship and the schedule of periodic *pūjās* and religious festivals, together with the ritual procedures appropriate to each occasion.

The Śaiva *āgamas* claim their authority to be divine, from the god whom they serve. They embody one system of knowledge that first existed as

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▶ A female devotee with hand cymbals, singing in praise of her lord Śiva. This private *pūjā* is taking place at a shrine within a palace complex. The *liṅga* has been adorned with fresh flowers. An illustration to the musical mode *Bhairavi Ragini*, from a *rāgamālā* series. Rajasthan, probably Mewar. *c.*1520–40. Gouache on paper. 21.2 x 16.4 cm. V&A: IS.110–1955

'undifferentiated sound', a clear reference to Vedic cosmogony.[4] The sculptural image of Śiva Dakṣiṇamūrti, which from around the tenth century was favoured as the image to occupy the south-facing wall of Cola Śaiva temples, represents Śiva 'silently' teaching the sages (*ṛiṣis*) the highest knowledge (*Śivajñāna*), divine revelation conveyed through pure thought (pl.80).[5] The early-eighth-century foundation inscription at the Kailāsanātha temple, Kanchipuram, provides one of the earliest references to the Śaiva Siddhānta School, leading advocates of the use of the *āgamas*. Therein the Pallava king Narasiṁhavarman II (695–728) describes himself as 'one whose means of knowledge is the *āgamas*'.[6] The standard text of *āgamic* ritual in south India is the *Somaśambhu-paddhati*, known to us from an eleventh-century recension.[7] These texts are a more or less complete record of liturgical and invocational practices of early medieval Hindu India, and as such are critical documents for understanding the early formation and evolution of temple Hinduism.

The traditional *āgama* texts are essential for the correct performance of ritual activity, both private and public. These forms of worship (*pūjās*) can be performed on a number of levels. Most fundamental is private worship, because it gives

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◀ A young woman offers flowers to a temple image of Gaṇeśa in an act of personal devotion. The devotee is required to circumambulate (*pradakṣiṇa*) the temple sanctuary, honouring the secondary deities, before entering the temple sanctuary to see her god (to 'take *darśana*'). Ekambareśvara temple, Kanchipuram, Tamilnadu, 1992. Photograph by Frank Monaco. V&A: IS. 149-2006. Given by Frank Monaco

expression to the personal devotional aspect of worship. This is best understood as the concept of *bhakti*, in which a devotee gives expression to his or her unfettered devotion for their chosen form of god. Such worship can be performed either by following ritual procedure, such as a circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇa*) of the shrine (pl.101) followed by taking *darśana*, or it can be experienced internally, by meditation and visualization. *Pūjās* – enacted rituals – can address different needs. Some seek material benefits for the devotee; others have the higher aim of leading to spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*). Some can be undertaken alone by the devotee, and can be performed equally well in a household shrine as in a temple. Other rituals require the mediation of a priest.

The hymns and poems composed by the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava saints in praise of their lords provide a literary canon of devotional literature of unparalleled beauty and passion. These poet-saints existed outside the temple establishment and they often showed their contempt for institutional worship, expressly mocking the veneration of images. They laid stress on the individual's goal of mystic union with god, often expressing this quest in the language of lovers. Among the most explicit are the hymns of the twelfth-century poetess-saint Mahadeviyakka, who often wrote of her devotion to Śiva in erotic terms:

> He bartered my heart,
> looted my flesh,
> claimed as tribute,
> my pleasure,
> took over,
> all of me.
>
> I'm the woman of love
> for my lord, white as jasmine.[8]

Nonetheless, the extremes of *bhakti* asceticism were not for everyone, and the bulk of the populace pursued their devotional life within the context of institutionalized temple worship.

Temple worship

Although worship and prayer can take place in the home, or indeed almost anywhere, it is within the context of the temple that major acts of public worship are performed. In the Hindu realm, many of these necessitate the role of the Brahman priest to serve as spiritual intermediary and arbiter, tending the deity and regulating devotee access to the image (*mūrti*). The primary duty of the priests is to serve the daily needs of the temple's deity; only after these obligations have been fulfilled can they attend to the needs of the lay devotees (pl.102).

Daily worship (*nityapūjā*) can be performed on the devotee's behalf by a priest. It may be undertaken as a communal act of worship with the assembled congregation, in which case the devotees share in prayers that are offered up to the deity embodied in the icon, and partake of the blessed food (*prasāda*). Alternatively, it can be private in the sense that an individual, or more typically a family, will request prayers to be performed to mark times of special need or thanksgiving. The first taking of *prasāda* by an infant could be such an occasion; this is a form of 'baptism', the formal receiving of the infant into the faith (pl.107).

The most privileged role in a temple is intimate access to the god in the inner sanctum, a duty claimed historically by the highest caste Brahman priests. These are men whose distant forefathers were the bearers of the Vedic knowledge, and who today still learn the knowledge of ritual orally in temple-based classes (pl.103). Temple-educated Brahmans devote their lives to the service of their deity,

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▶ A Brahman priest distributing blessed food (*prasāda*) after the performance of a *pūjā*. Ekambareśvara temple, Kanchipuram, Tamilnadu, 1992. Photograph by Frank Monaco. V&A: IS. 148-2006. Given by Frank Monaco

and have hereditary rights to perform *pūjās*. Their privileges include acting as gatekeepers and key holders to the deity's chamber, and serving the deity's daily needs. They alone have unrestricted access to the image, especially at those most intimate moments of the day, such as waking, bathing and dressing the deity.

Before the god is paraded, the priests are responsible for dressing and garlanding the image (pls.104–5). Devotees often assume responsibility for collecting and delivering fresh flowers to the temple, as an act of religious piety (pl.109). Small portable images are wrapped in fine cloth and carried by hand by a senior priest in ritual circumambulations (*pradakṣiṇa*) within the temple enclosure. For larger festivals, the icons are installed on palanquins or temple cars under priestly supervision for transport beyond the temple limit, where blessings are performed en route.

Historically, the priests were supported in these functions by female servants, known as *devadāsī* ('slaves of god').[9] In the past the *devadāsī* shared similar entitlements to those of the priest in their specific areas of ritual activity. This role was gradually usurped by male priests and the *devadāsī* were reduced to a few key ritual tasks, notably the waving of lamps and the cooling of the image with the fly-whisk (*cāmara*). A daily responsibility was the waving of the pot-vessel lamp (*kumbhadīpa*) before the deity, to mark the start and conclusion of a *pūjā* or a procession (*pradakṣiṇa*), to ward off inauspicious forces. This was especially critical at the twilight *pūjā*, held at a time when night replaces day and malevolent forces are unleashed. The other principal role was providing entertainment for the deity by dancing and singing auspicious and laudatory songs (*stotra*) in praise of the god. When a portable image was taken on daily procession within the temple enclosure, the *devadāsī* accompanied the group singing devotional songs. At the bedchamber *pūjā*, performed around 10 p.m., the *devadāsī* importantly sang lullabies as the god was lulled to sleep. Throughout these ceremonies, the deities were treated like royalty, and celebrated in the eulogizing language normally reserved for kings.

Devotion and *darśana* – seeing God

The quest for union with the divine is called *bhakti*, literally the 'partaking of God'. It denotes an active and loving devotion to a personal god. At a most material level this usually means inner communion through prayer and the securing of

a momentary glimpse of the icon at the temple. *Darśana* (seeing) is the ability of the devotee to see the divine in a religious icon. This concept is so fundamental to Indian worship that a modern Hindu going to the temple to perform a *pūjā* would tend to say that they were not going to worship, but going for *darśana* (pls.107–8).[10] The benefit of making eye-to-eye contact with the living presence of the deity is the blessing or grace bestowed by the god on the devotee. Devotees queue for hours for the opportunity to file past the cult image, and to exchange eye contact with the deity for a few seconds. Other opportunities occur when the portable images from a temple are taken on a ritual journey around the temple grounds and, during special annual festivals, through the village or town, where offerings can be received by the priests on behalf of the deity.

The sheer necessity of 'seeing' one's god installed in his 'house', not only underlines the daily cycle of temple worship, but also motivates the faithful to experience *darśana* at places of critical importance in their chosen deity's mythology. The concept also encompasses seeing holy places and holy persons, both of which are touched by the divine and therefore capable of dispensing spiritual benefit. These pilgrim centres are referred to as the *tīrthas*, points of passage often described as 'river crossings', which bridge the mundane and sublime worlds of man and god. The hymns of the Tamil Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava saints, written between the sixth and tenth centuries, were largely responsible for making these sacred places and landscapes known to the common worshipper, and thereby triggered the passion for pilgrimage to take *darśana* that still characterizes popular Hinduism to this day. The *Tevaram*, a corpus of Śaiva poet-saints' verses and a primary scripture for Tamil Śaivas, devotes long hymns to celebrating these holy places.[11] The sacred geography of the Indian subcontinent is marked by many such sites, and the routes between them mark out the pilgrim ways.

Darśana is taken with one's chosen god, Śiva, Viṣṇu or Devī, the goddess. This sectarian classification obscures the higher level of complexity underlying temple worship and the identity of gods throughout the Indian subcontinent. In reality, almost every temple, especially in southern India, is the home of a particular deity, with a local name and a personal identity. Typically the form of the god celebrated has a biography linking him to the locale and is celebrated in devotional hymns and literature. A link is claimed to the Purāṇas, epic literature or to a local myth,

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▶ **Brahman priests performing a ritual offering (*yajña*) of ghee onto fire (*homa*), accompanied by the recitation of sacred syllables (*mantras*). Chidambaram temple, Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, 1990**

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◀ A priest preparing icons for processional use. They are bathed, cleaned with a solution of wet camphor ash and rinsed in fragrant water, in preparation for a festival parade. Svetavaneśvara temple, Tiruvenkadu, Tanjavur District, Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, April 1993

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◀ Processional icons dressed in golden cloth and garlanded with sweet-smelling jasmine. They are now ready for securing to their palanquins and cars for procession. Svetavaneśvara temple, Tiruvenkadu, Tanjavur District, Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, April 1993

associating a place with a specific event in the life-story of the deity. This is known as the *sthalapurāṇa* (myth of the place), and forms an essential part of each temple's identity.

Many of the names acquired by Śiva and Viṣṇu in southern India come out of the devotional hymns written in the vernacular language by the poet-saints. At the small hill town of Melukote, in rural Karnataka, Viṣṇu is celebrated as Śrīmannarayana. The town was established as a centre of Śrīvaiṣṇavite philosophy by the guru Ramanuja in the thirteenth century (pl.110) and asserts its claim as one of the four chief abodes of Lord Viṣṇu through the antiquity of its ancient name of Gomantagiri, which appears in both the *Harivaṁśa* and the *Matsyapurāṇa*. Numerous legends are invoked establishing the sacred geography of the site, such as Śrīdevī slaying the demon Ahi on the hill, which is itself believed to embody the Ādiśeṣa, the serpent upon which Viṣṇu had his cosmic rest.[12] Such claims are not exclusive: other pilgrim centres (*tīrthas*) make similar claims. The seven hills of Tirumala at Tirupati, home of Viṣṇu as Lord Venkatesvara, are also claimed in local myth as the body of the serpent Ādiśeṣa.

The individuality of the temple deity is a powerful factor in understanding the devotional landscape of India. The most celebrated case of the localization of a deity is that of Madurai, where Śiva, known locally as Sundaresvara, marries the local indigenous goddess, the Pandyan warrior queen Mīnākṣī, thereby wedding the Sanskritic Brahmānical tradition with the local Tamil-speaking non-Brahmānical cult (pl.122).

Temple *pūjās* and festivals

Pūjā is the performance of ritual worship by making offerings as gestures of veneration and adoration to the deity. All priestly rituals must be accompanied by recitation of formulae (*mantra*), condensed symbolic syllables (*bīja*), and symbolic gestures (*mudrās*). To please the gods in this way allows for the possibility of divine grace, of benefit to both the individual worshipper and to society. Ritual worship can be performed directly by the devotee, or more frequently by a Brahman priest on the devotee's behalf. Prayers are also performed *for* the gods, without devotees being present, as part of the priest's duty to serve his god. Public *pūjās* generate spiritual benefits for the whole community.[13]

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▶ Somāskanda, the divine family of Śiva, Pārvatī and their infant child Skanda (now missing). A popular subject for processional icons in the Cola period, such images were bathed, dressed and adorned with flowers before embarking on their festival journeying. Tanjavur-Pudukottai region, Tamilnadu. Late 10th–early 11th century, Cola period. Copper alloy. Height 47 cm. V&A: IM.158–1929

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▲ After baptism, usually on the 40th day after birth, an infant is ready to take his first *darśana*; here an infant has been passed by his parents to a priest, who holds him before Śiva in order to 'see his god' for the first time. Panguni Uttiram festival, Śrī Kapalisvara temple, Mylapore, Chennai. Photograph by R. Eswarraj, March 2003

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◀ Śiva, robed, bejewelled and garlanded, seated in royal ease, being paraded during the Panguni Uttiram festival, Śrī Kapaliśvara temple, Mylapore, Chennai. Photograph by the author, March 2003

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▶ A male Śaivite devotee gathering flowers, possibly oleander, a flower favoured in the worship of Śiva. The devotee wears strings of the *rukraksha* beads holy to Śiva, together with pendant gem ear-ornaments, suggesting a person of high rank, perhaps the head of a *tambiran* (*maṭha*), a Hindu monastery. Coastal Tamilnadu, possibly Pulicut, reportedly collected in Sri Lanka. Hand-painted and mordant-dyed cotton (*kalamkari*). 100 x 153 cm. V&A: anonymous loan

Each temple has its annual calendar of auspicious celebrations, marking out the year in a cycle of ritual activities designed to honour the presiding deity. Temple *pūjā* are scheduled daily, fortnightly, monthly and annually. Others are scheduled according to the dictates of the lunar calendar, at intervals of several years. The less frequent rituals are marked by festivals (*utsava*), and the grandest is the annual processing of the deity and his entourage around the streets of the town in a festival known as *brahmotsava* (festival of Brahmā) or *mahotsava* (great festival). However, even the largest festival begins with the performance of the daily *nityapūjā*, that most auspicious building block of the entire ritual repertoire, and only after this can the processional activities proceed.

The key steps of Hindu *nityapūjā* are firstly purification rites (*suddhi*) to prepare both the devotee and the place of worship for a visitation by the god; secondly the invocation (*āvāhana*) to summon the god to occupy the icon (pl.70), and thirdly offerings to honour the deity. The moment after the god descends into the icon is celebrated by the worshipper with offerings to please the five senses, such as perfumed flower petals and garlands, the ringing of bells and the lighting of lamps, along with the reciting of *mantras* and other sacred texts. Devotional poems, songs and dances may be performed at this time, to the accompaniment of temple musicians.

Daily worship (*nityapūjā*) of the central image in a temple is normally performed up to six or even eight times, depending on the wealth of the temple. A typical god's timetable is:

5 a.m. – awakening the deity (priests only)
6.30 a.m. – dawn worship
10.30 a.m. – noon worship
4.30 p.m. – evening worship
7.30 p.m. – midnight worship
Up to 10 p.m. – bedchamber worship (priests only)

Each *pūjā* has defined stages consisting of a series of offerings and services performed for the deity by the priests, and the deity's response. They are: offering a seat (*acana*), inviting the god's presence (*āvāhana*), installing and consecrating

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▼ Portrait sculpture of the Vaiṣṇava saint Ramanuja (d.1137), a famous theologian who preached widely in southern India but is most closely associated with Srirangam in Tanjavur district, and with Melukote, in rural Karnataka. The saint holds his hands in *añgalimudrā* in veneration of his lord, and bears an axe, symbolizing clarity of mind. Through his preaching and writing Ramanuja was responsible for providing the *bhakti* movement with a sound philosophical foundation, and with instituting many rituals for the benefit of devotees. Tamilnadu, 19th century. Copper alloy. Height 22.5 cm. V&A: IM.33–1936. Bequest of E.L. Cappell

the icon (*sthāpana*), entrance of the god's spirit (*sannidhana*), invoking the specific place of installation (*sannirodhaha*), washing the icon's feet (*pādya*), reciting *mantras* (*acamaha*), offering water (*arghya*), bathing or lustrating the icon (*abhiṣeka*), dressing the icon (*vastavestana*), anointing with sandalwood paste (*gandham*), offering flowers (*angabhusana*), burning incense and camphor (*dhūpadīpa*), offering food (*naivedya*), and sacrifice offering (*bali*). Of these, the most critical procedures are bathing (*abhiṣeka*), using a flame to burn incense (*dhūpadīpa*), and offering food (*naivedya*). Central to the *pūjās* is the use of *yantras*, sacred geometric designs that give visual expression to the *mantras* (sacred syllables), and which serve as focal points for concentration during the ritual. Apart from the rituals at the beginning and end of the day, associated with awakening and putting to sleep, all other services are public acts of worship, open to devotees to witness and participate in through *darśana*.

In addition to ritual worship focused on the cult image, secondary deities and 'saints' are celebrated at appropriate times in the ritual cycle. Immovable images in subsidiary shrines within the temple compound are visited by devotees during their circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇa*) of the main shrine house as a cleansing exercise preparatory to taking *darśana* of the cult icon. The images are dressed, lamps are lit, garlands are offered, and in some temple traditions the stone *mūrtis* are clad in sheet-metal body covers (*kavaca*). These mirror the physique of the sculptured image and are typically modelled from silver or gilt-copper. This practice is also followed in Jain Śvetāmbara image veneration.

According to the Śrīvaiṣṇava *āgamas*, three forms of ceremonies (*utsavas*) can be performed according to the needs of the devotee: everyday *pūjās* for general worship, those to address specific needs or to avert crises, and those for acquiring merit or wealth. These are normally public festivals requiring the procession of the deity (*utsava-mūrti*) within the temple precincts.

Great care is taken in dressing the Hindu god to create an image of regal splendour. As part of the daily *pūjā* at Madurai, Mīnākṣī is adorned with one of the many sets of precious stone-encrusted gold jewellery donated to her by devotees over the centuries. This gold and jewel-studded jewellery has been expressly made for the deity, either as a commissioned gift from wealthy, often royal, donors, or made up from secular jewellery presented to the deity by female devotees.

If they are being taken on procession (*pradakṣiṇa*) beyond the temple compound, they are celebrated with further lavish jewels, golden body covers (*kavaca*) and golden silks (pls.111, 113, 115). Before setting off on these parades, the gods are bathed with purified water and sandalwood ash, and then dressed in fine textiles, typically a gold and silk sari. Great care is taken particularly in the arranging of the deity's jewellery. The processional images are secured on their vehicles and assembled, typically under a temporary shelter protected from the harsh heat of the day. Local labourers are honoured to carry or pull the god's conveyance, and are fed and rested at the temple for the duration of the festival. Only the officiating priests are permitted to travel with their god on the moving platform, receiving offerings and dispensing blessings on behalf of the deity. The use of the finest jewellery is restricted to the annual festivals. At Melukote, in Karnataka, the gold and jewel-encrusted crown and necklaces (*tāli*) of Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī are brought to the temple from the bank vaults of a nearby town under police escort. The first display of the god, in the temple's passageway, fully bejewelled and radiant, draws gasps of wonder from the devotees privileged to have access to the temple on the festival night (pl.111).

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▼ The processional icons of Viṣṇu, Śrī Devī and Bhū Devī, jewelled, garlanded and mounted on a palanquin carried by devotees during the Brahmotsavam festival, known locally as Vairamundi (Diamond Crown), celebrated annually at the Cheluve Narayāna temple, Melukote, Karnataka. Photograph by the author, March 2003

The ninth-century *bhakti* poet saint Nammāḷvar was opposed to such opulent embellishments, which he saw not as an aid to worship but rather as a barrier to comprehending the divine. In one hymn he expressly decries the use of bejewelled golden images:

> Feet, navel, hands,
> chest, eyes, and lips
> red-rayed jewels
> set in a blue glow,
> and golden silks round his waist,
> my lord is all blaze and dazzle:
> I do not know how to reach him.[14]

Monthly festivals are also celebrated according to *āgamic* requirements. The level of activity and relative opulence is left to the discretion of each temple, depending on its means. Madurai, a wealthy city, is famed for its extravagant celebration of temple festivals. The highlights of the temple's ritual calendar are the annual festivals (*samvatsarotsava*), which are marked by the performance of a series of key ceremonies, including the parading of the gods on their animal vehicles (*vāhanas*) and their installation in temple cars (*rathas*). These temple festivals are known as *utsavas*, events to 'drive away sorrow', and the portable bronze images paraded as *utsava-mūrtis*, 'ceremonial/festival images'.

According to the *Visvalarmavāstuśāstra*, of all the festivals that can be performed to honour the gods, the highest level of spiritual merit accrues from the procession of temple cars (pls.116–17).[15] The temple car festival (*rathotsava* or *rathayātrā*) is typically conducted over seven days ('to banish the seven "illusions" – *mayas* – which tarnish human life'). The *Brahmostava* is a ten-day festival celebrated in Panguni (March/April) that culminates with the dawning of the New Year in the Tamil calendar. The climax is the last day, when the *ratha* is drawn through the streets. The ritual and physical requirements of the temple car, along with its prescribed adornments of pearls, garlands, plantain leaves and fruit, betel nut, coconut and cloth, are laid down in the *Śrīprasannasaṁhitā*.[16] A survey of temple cars conducted in Tamilnadu indicated that a typical *ratha*

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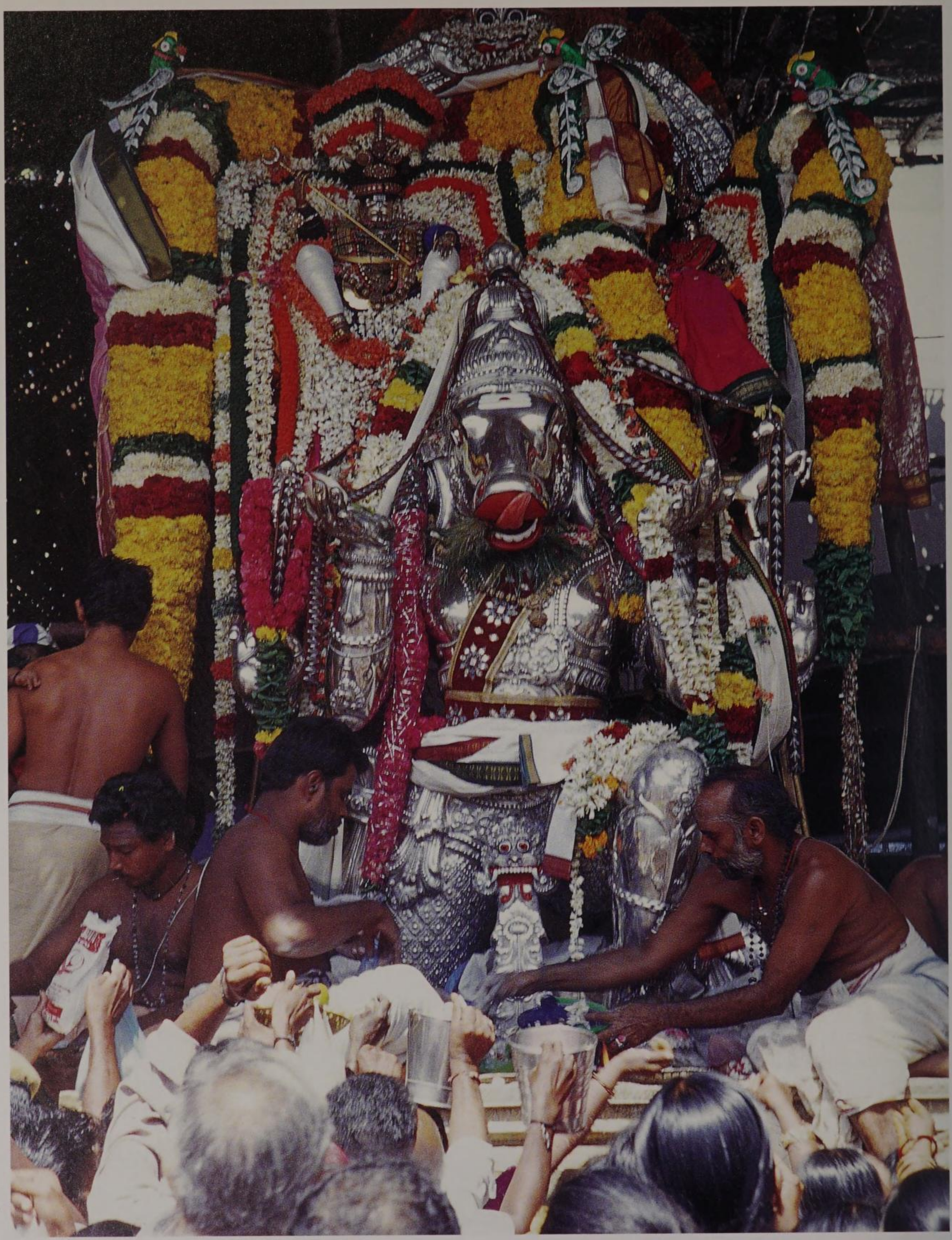
▶ Viṣṇu and his consorts Śrī Devī and Bhū Devī. Sets of icons such as this triad were an important component of temple imagery, enabling the enactment of processional worship on religious festivals. Excavated in Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. 11th century, Cola period. Copper alloy. Height Śrī Devī 54 cm, Viṣṇu 66 cm, Bhu Devī 50.5 cm. V&A: IM. 149, 127, 137–1927



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▲ Portable bronze icons of Śiva Naṭarāja, heavily garlanded, being carried by devotees, followed by another palanquin bearing an icon of Pārvatī. The divine couple are processed around the temple's sanctuary in a ritual circumambulation (*pradakṣiṇa*) before proceeding beyond the temple enclosure into the urban space. Śvetavaneśvara temple, Tiruvenkadu, Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, 1993

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▶ Śiva Naṭarāja performing the wild *tāṇḍava* dance, emblematic of Śiva's cosmic dual role as creator and destroyer of the universe. Reportedly excavated in Tinnevelly District, Tamilnadu. 12th century, Cola period. Copper alloy. Height 81cm. V&A: IM. 71–1935. Bequest of Lord Ampthill

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◀ Śiva and Pārvatī, bejewelled and festooned with garlands, seated in royal ease on the silver calf-bull mount Nandi, being paraded during the fifth day – Rishaba Vāhana – of the Panguni Uttiram festival. Devotees offer food to the priests to be blessed. Śrī Kapaliśvara temple, Mylapore, Chennai. Photograph by the author, March 2003

boasted 194 sculptural images, excluding mythical animals (*yāḷi*) and decorative panels.[17] These were carved in hardwood and polychromed with a gesso and paint surface, to create a miscellany of celestial images directly evocative of the temples the processional cars imitate.

The portable icon is prepared for the *ratha* parade by the performing of a number of royal courtesies (*rāja upacārams*); he is offered betel leaves and areca nuts, and when he is installed in the temple car a *pūjā* is performed in his honour. A mirror is provided to check that all is in order, and burning camphor is offered (*harati*). The ritual preparations complete, the procession begins to the accompaniment of temple musicians. Rest places (usually temporary *maṇḍapas*) along the route, provide shelter for the deity. Icons carried on palanquins are able to engage in further auspicious ritual activities, such as immersion in the temple tank or nearby river.

Portable icons, usually in cast copper alloy, are paraded for the pleasure of the deity and for the benefit of devotees. Young men compete for the honour of helping to carry the palanquin, pull the model temple car (*ratha*) or propel the floating temple (*teppa*) on the temple tank. A popular temple festival, known as *teppotsava*, involves the parading of the portable icons on a floating pontoon in the temple tank. As sunset approaches, the adorned icons are carried on small

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[Overleaf] The festival car (*ratha*) being drawn through the streets of Mylapore on the seventh day of the Brahmotsavam (Great Festival) of the annual Panguni (March–April) celebration, Śrī Kapaliśvara temple, Mylapore, Chennai. Photograph by R. Eswarraj, March 2003.

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▲ The temple tank festival (*teppotsava*), in which the goddess Kāmākṣī, Śiva's Śakti, is carried at dusk by the priests from the temple sanctuary and installed on a floating temple model (*teppam*, a pontoon-mounted *ratha*) and, after sunset, propelled around the temple tank by devotees. Kāmākṣī Ambal temple, Kanchipuram. Photograph by R. Eswarraj, March 2003

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▶ The goddess Kāmāksī, 'whose looks are amorous', who presides at the Kāmākṣī Ambal temple, Kanchipuram. Contemporary print, purchased at Kanchipuram, 2002

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▼ A temple dancer (*devadāsī*); panel from a processional car (*ratha*). Traditionally *devadāsī* ('slaves of god') performed ritual functions alongside the male priests and had specific areas of ritual responsibility associated with celebrating the god, at both daily *pūjās* and festivals, where they danced before the processional car. Kerala. *c.*18th century. Polychromed wood. 114 cm. V&A: IS.95–1987

palanquins from the temple sanctuary to the tank, where the priests direct their conveyance down the stone steps and onto the floating temple model, which is brightly illuminated with colourful electric lights. This is then drawn around the tank by devotees pulling submerged ropes, so that the waterborne temple appears to propel itself across the water – a wondrous sight indeed (pl.117). The deity and his consorts are attended throughout by their priests, who make offerings to please the gods and wave fly-whisk fans to keep them cool. At Tirupati, one of the greatest Śrīvaiṣṇava temples, this floating festival is celebrated over five days. On night one the portable icon (*utsava-mūrti*) of Kṛṣṇa is paraded, on night two the icon of Rāma, and for the remaining three evenings the portable image of Viṣṇu himself, the lord of Tirumali, and his consorts Śrī Devī and Bhū Devī, presides. According to a temple inscription, this festival was first performed at Tirupati on 15 June 1473.[18] Tank festivals are also widely celebrated, and in the past have drawn vast crowds of participating devotees, as they do today (pl.120).

These festival processions were performed early in the history of temple Hinduism in Tamilnadu, as witnessed by the celebratory hymns of Campantar (Sambandar), the seventh-century child-prodigy devotee of Śiva:

> The Lord of Citticcaram shrine in Naraiyur,
> Who has the river in his hair,
> the poison stain on his throat,
> and the Veda on his tongue,
> goes resplendent in ceremonial dress,
> as his devotees and perfected sages
> sing and dance his widespread fame,
> and the sound of festival drums
> beaten on the streets where the temple-car is pulled
> spreads on every side.[19]

The evening of the last day of the *Brahmotsava* festival is marked by several special events. At the Śaiva temple the divine wedding of Śiva and Mīnākṣī, Mīnākṣī Kalyāṇam, is re-enacted. This is a favourite subject for depiction in the sculptural art of Madurai (pl.122). The marriage is celebrated in the Madurai temple's greatest festival, held in Cittirai (April–May) each year, and is also honoured every day as part of the bedchamber *pūjā*. This daily ritual concludes at the goddess's shrine, the Palliarai Vila. Before the closing of the temple doors for the night, the golden feet of Sundareśvara are carried on a palanquin to the shrine of the goddess and placed by the priests in her bedchamber, symbolizing their union as husband and wife. In the morning the goddess's form is considered as Mahāṣoḍaśī, the quintessence of yogic bliss.[20] Śiva's feet are returned to his shrine, the temple's main sanctum, where they will stay until the next night. The divine marriage is also celebrated through an annual re-enactment performed in the evening at the Kalyana *maṇḍapa*, in the temple grounds (pl.121). In the past *devadāsī* played an important role in the celebration of this festival (pl.119). This is an immensely popular event, especially with women, and is attended by thousands of devotees.

On the same night another drama acted by the gods themselves is performed at Vaiṣṇava temples. This is the Festival of Romantic Quarrels (*pranaya kalaha utsava*) – part of an annual ritual festival performed at all major Śrīvaiṣṇava temples – in which a divine quarrel is enacted. Viṣṇu returns home late at night to find the temple door locked by Śrī, his wife, who suspects him of some dalliance. After lengthy and heated exchanges reconciliation is finally achieved through the intervention of the poet-saint Nammāḷvar, and Viṣṇu is admitted, garlands of

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[Overleaf] Devotees celebrating the annual immersion festival held in the month of *Thai* (February–March) at the Mahamaham tank, Kumbakonam. This tank is deemed the holiest of all in south India, and it is believed to contain waters of all nine of India's sacred rivers, the holiest of which is the Ganges. Devotees believe immersion in these waters will cleanse one of all past sins. Tanjavur District, Tamilnadu. Photographer unknown, late 19th century. V&A SSEA Archive

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▶ The annual re-enactment of the divine wedding of Śiva and Pārvatī (Kalyāṇasundara) performed on the penultimate night of the Panguni Uttiram festival, Śrī Kapaliśvara temple, Mylapore, Chennai. Portable bronze images of the divine couple are installed in a temporary *maṇḍapa* within the temple compound and the priests enact the rituals of marriage to the delight of a large audience, mostly female devotees. Photograph by the author, March 2003.

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▲ Relief depicting the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī witnessed by Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī (Kalyānasundara). End panel, probably from a jewellery casket. It is engraved with the date 'Samvat 1823' (CE 1766). This subject is popular in south India, especially in Madurai, where it is assumes a local character, Śiva marrying Mīnākṣī, the princess of the Pandyan royal household, thus effecting a union of local traditions with Sanskritic culture. Tamilnadu. 1766, Nayak period. Ivory. 15.8 cm. V&A: IM.70–1939

flowers are exchanged as declarations of love and domestic bliss is restored. It is a story of the inseparability of divine justice (Viṣṇu) and divine grace (Śrī),[21] couched in the most human of terms. One of the most celebrated annual performances of this drama is at the Srirangam's Ranganatha temple, situated on an island on the Kaveri River near Tiruchirapalli, the most important Vaiṣṇava temple in south India, equalled only by Tirupati, in Andhra Pradesh.

Periodic festivals (*mahotsavas*), *pūjās* repeat the daily rituals, performing them again for the deity's movable images. Temple processions, both within the temple precincts and beyond, are normally led by singers of Tamil devotional hymns, while priests reciting the Vedas follow behind the portable icon. This status of the contribution of the poet-saints is remarkable. While these devotional hymns are seen as complementary to the ancient knowledge of the Vedas, they are also viewed as another form of knowledge, one that can reach the hearts of the people. The respect extended to the poet-saints – sets of their images are paraded along with the gods on festival days – is a clear indication of their power over popular devotionalism, an influence that the Brahman priests wisely saw was best acknowledged and absorbed rather than ignored or suppressed. Nowhere was the power of the cult of saints stronger than in the large temple towns of southern India. At the Kapaliśivara temple at Mylapore, Chennai, the poet-saint Campantar (Sambandar) composed hymns in praise of the processional festivals performed there in the seventh century. He is also remembered affectionately for the miracles he performed there, and is celebrated during the processional festival with his personal ablution ceremony (sacred bath ritual, *abhiṣeka pūjā*) at a small tank shrine outside the temple grounds (pls.123–4). At Madurai, he is credited with converting the Pandyian king of that ancient and prosperous city (known to Ptolomy) to Śaivism, having defeated Buddhists and Jains in fierce debate. The achievements of the Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava poet-saints have provided not only the richest legacy of devotional poetry in all India, but also a wonderous series of

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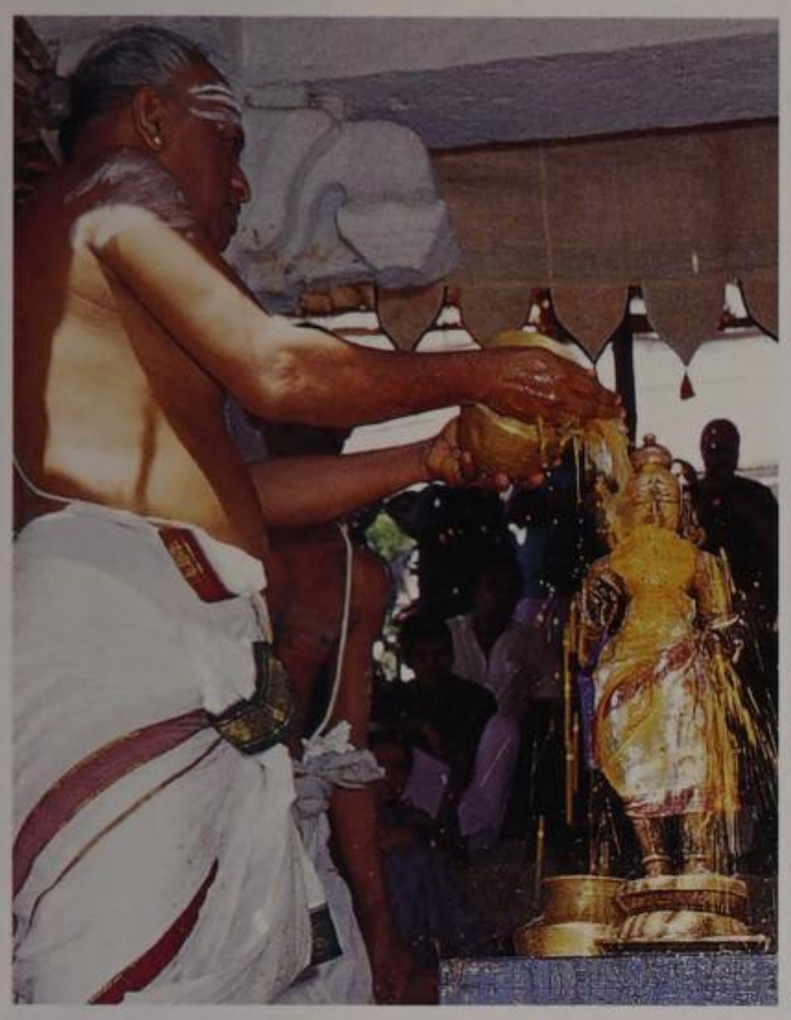
▶ Sambandar, the Śaiva child poet-saint, gesturing skywards to the abode of Śiva. A processional icon, reportedly excavated in the vicinity of the Tinnevelly District, Tamilnadu. 11th century, Cola period. Copper alloy. Height 18 cm. V&A: IM.785–1935. Bequest of Lord Ampthill



124

▲ Performance of a ritual bathing (*abhiṣeka*) of Sambandar at a small shrine in the tank of the Śrī Kapaliśvara temple, during the Panguni Uttiram festival, Mylapore, Chennai. Photograph by the author, March 2003

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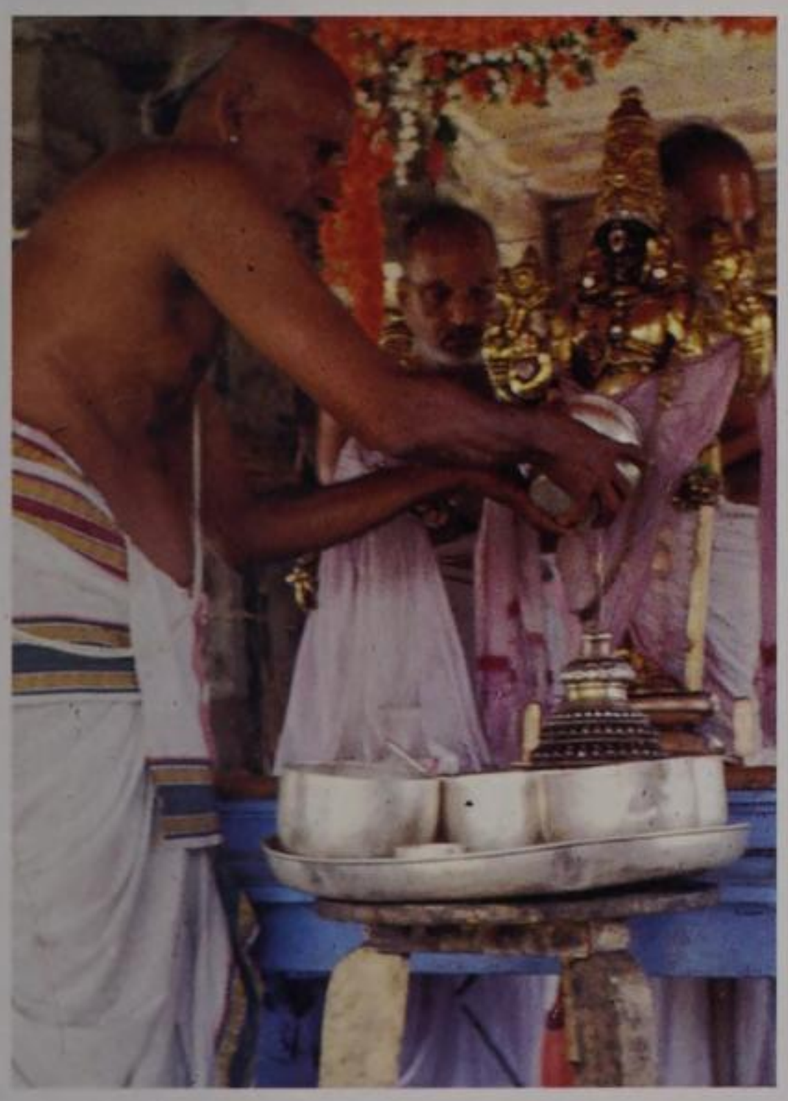
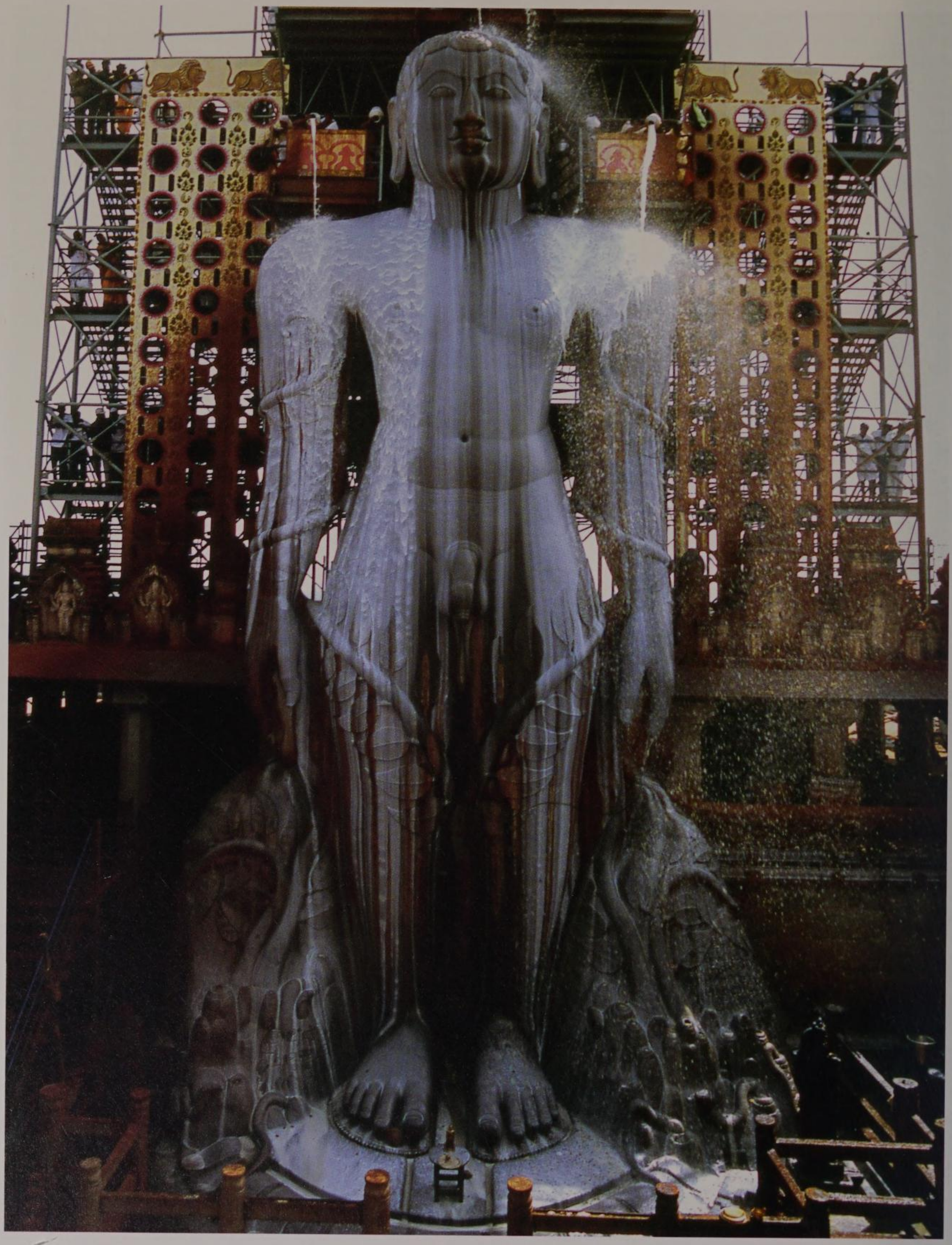
▼ Priests performing an *abhiṣeka* ritual on portable images of Viṣṇu and his consorts. Vaiṣṇava temple, Tanjavur district, Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, 1993





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◀ The twelve-year-cycle enactment of the *mahamastakabhiṣeka* festival at the monumental Jain rock-cut sculpture of Bāhubali, at Sravana Belgola, Karnataka. The festival attracts over a million Jain pilgrims worldwide. Photograph by Jeremy Hunter, February 2006

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▶ During the celebration of the great *abhiseka* of the monumental Bahubali, another lustration ceremony is performed at the nearby temple at Bhandara Basadi, when icons of all the 24 Jinas are simultaneously bathed with milk, an act of great joy to devotees. Photograph by Jeremy Hunter, February 2006

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▼ Bāhubali, the Jain hero who renounced violence after brutal combat with his brother. He attained *mokṣa* following protracted standing meditation (*kāyotsarga*) in a forest, during which time vines entwined his body. Although not admitted into the Jain pantheon of Jinas (liberated souls), he is effectively worshipped as one. This small icon, inspired by the great 10th-century rock-cut image at Sravana Belgola (see pl.127), was probably intended for a family shrine. 18th–19th century, Karnataka. Brass alloy. Height 26 cm. V&A: IM.14–1922

biographies that add a human dimension to *bhakti* devotionalism. Their appeal was overwhelming.

Normally the deity is located (by his grace) within the temple compound, except during the festivals when the movable images are paraded. These extended processions are designed to allow the deity to visit his 'territory' and mark out his authority, as well as providing further opportunities for the population to experience *darśana*. The ritual topography then becomes more complex, as the procession proceeds slowly through town, stopping at regular intervals to receive offerings and dispense blessings. The annual processional festivals serve to affirm the integration of the sacred and urban spaces. Nowhere in the entire subcontinent do we see such a complete harmonization of religious monuments and urban spaces as in Tamilnadu. This has evolved directly out of a shared history, with the growth of temples and urbanization mirroring each other in their development. It is a *śāstric* requirement that the planning of an urban space should incorporate a major shrine to house the presiding gods, normally the tutelary deity of the ruling household. At each of the temple towns, the rectangular plan of the temple sets the pattern of radiating streets and roads that ripple out from the temple, at the heart of the urban plan. This is seen in its purest form at such centres as Chidambaram, Srirangam and Madurai.

The final component of the festival cycle consists of festivals held at intervals of several years, for which the dates are determined according to periodic solar phenomena, such as a solar eclipse and so on. The *Kumbhamelā* on the Ganges at Allahabad is held every twelve years, as is the *Mahamaham* tank festival at Kumbhakonam (pl.120). The Jain bathing ceremony (*mahamastakabhiṣeka*) of Gommatesvara (the prince Bahubali) at Sravana Belgola in Karnataka is similarly held on average at twelve-yearly intervals, although the interval between festivals can vary from ten to fifteen years to coincide with particular celestial conjunctions. The earliest evidence of this latter festival being performed is a horoscope inscription showing the constellation of the planets on Sunday 13 March 981. It may be assumed that it has been performed regularly since that year, most recently in February 2006. The climax of this consecration ceremony is the sacred bath (*abhiṣeka*) in which the monumental rock-cut figure, some eighteen metres in height, is lustrated with up to twenty-one substances as part

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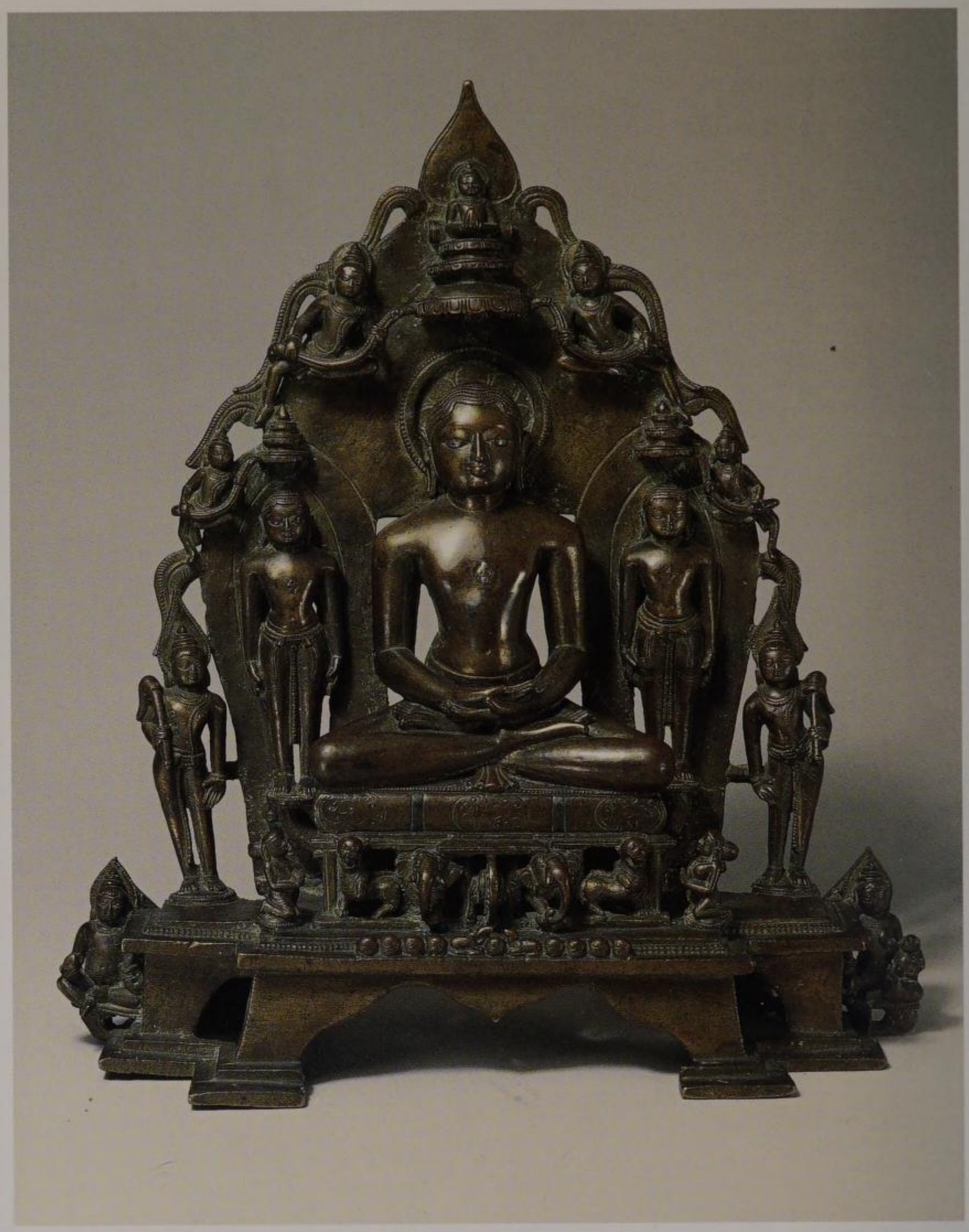
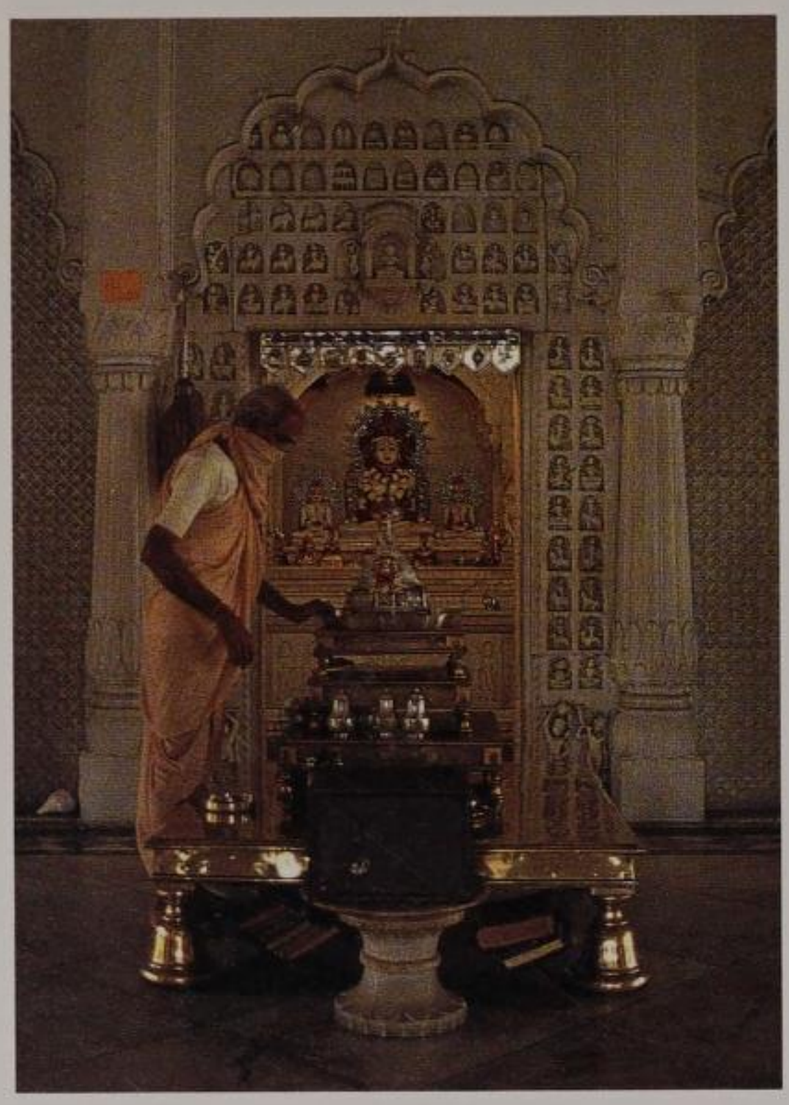
▶ Altarpiece with three Jinas (*tritīrtha*), one seated in meditation on a cushioned throne stand, flanked by two standing Jinas, each in the body-abandonment meditation posture (*kāyotsarga*). The ensemble is in turn attended by fly-whisk (*caurī*) bearers and celestial figures offering garlands. The diminutive kneeling figures facing the throne are the donor couple, who on this example remain anonymous, as this image is not inscribed. Early 11th century, western India. Copper alloy with silver inlay. Height 25.1 cm. V&A: IS.10–1968





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▲ A Jain monk performing a *pūjā* at the Shitalanatha temple, Kolkata. Photograph © Thomas Dix, 1991

of the head-anointing ceremony (*mastakabhiṣeka*) (pl.126). Bahubali is honoured as the first liberated soul (*siddha*) to attain *nirvāṇa* in Jainism. In addition, his noble character, linked with admiration for the austerities he performed as a forest ascetic (pl.128), has attracted great devotion from Jain devotees over the thousand years since his colossal image was first consecrated.

For Jains, daily worship is less complicated, and does not require the intervention of a mendicant. A standard daily *pūjā* is performed by Jain Śvetāmbara laity and monks and nuns of the Mūrtipūjāka sect, who acknowledge the use of icons in their devotional life (pls.129–130). 'The Rite of Veneration of Jina Images' (*caitya vandana*) is known by heart and recited daily before an image of the Jina. The worshipper sweeps the ground free of any microscopic life forms with his or her shawl, and then embarks on a series of requests for absolution and performs penance while reciting hymns to the twenty-four Jinas and to Indra, followed by a series of meditative and austerity postures.[22] This rite is concerned with cleansing the worshipper's soul to assist his or her passage to spiritual liberation (*mokṣa*), the goal of every Jain follower.

The Jain Śvetāmbara Jina image is adorned from the day of its installation ceremony, when the eyes are painted and often inlaid with glass or perhaps

jewels set in the eyes and forehead mark. There is no evidence that this happened historically with stone images, although inlay of the eyes is a common feature of historical metal images (pl.64). This ornamentation never happens to Digambara sect icons, which remain unadorned throughout their existence as reminders of the ascetic path to be followed. As witnessed by John Cort, 'ornamentation is part of the daily devotional interaction with [Jain] images. After everyone has performed his or her morning *pūjā* (worship), the temple's main image, as well as any other popular images, is carefully decorated, so that when visiting a temple in the evening for *darśana*, it is the fully decorated image that one sees.'[23] On festive occasions, the image is dressed with sheet-metal body covers (*kavaca*), usually silver or copper. These are also known as 'limbs' (*aṅgis*), and the ceremony of washing, anointing and adorning the icon is known as *aṅgapūjā* (body worship). This is the Jina as World King – the term *Jinendra* (Jina-king) is used by worshippers during *pūjās* (pl.131). The Jain justification for richly adorning a 'renouncer of the senses' appears to lie in the Śvetāmbara

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▶ **A new image of the Jina Mahāvīra, wearing a silver crown during the celebration of the Pratishtha Mahotsav installation and consecration ceremonies at the Jain Shikharbandhi temple, north London, August 2005. Photograph by the author**

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◀ Seated Jina Rishabhanatha, the first Jain *tīrthaṇkara*, one of the twenty-four 'liberated souls' who were canonised in the Jain pantheon. A wheel (*cakra*) beneath his throne, emblematic of the sacred teachings (*dharma*), is a generic symbol of Jina-hood (and also of Buddha-hood). The identifier of this Jina is his uncut hair; all other Jinas have cropped hair. The most recent of the Jinas is Mahāvīra, a contemporary of the historical Buddha. The earlier Jinas are a blend of historical and quasi-historical figures reaching back into the Vedic period. Uttar Pradesh, 9th century, Pratihara period. Sandstone. Height 78 cm. V&A: IS.12–1996

133

▶ Crowned Buddha, enthroned on a lotus-petal dais, flanked by Bodhisattvas and celestial celebrants. At the top of the back-plate the branches of a tree identify this scene, as does the hand gesture of touching the earth, with the site of Bodhgaya where the Buddha experienced enlightenment. The elaborate crown and neck torque allude to the Buddha as supreme spiritual ruler, 'king-like'. 12th century, Pala period. Black shale. Height 124.5 cm. V&A: IS.617–1872

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▼ Vajrayāna Buddhist goddess Prajñāpāramitā, the personification of the *Astasahaśrikaprajñāpāramitā* text, which is displayed in book form supported by a lotus stem. Probably from Sri Lanka, reportedly found in peninsular Thailand. 9th–10th century, Polonnaruva period. Copper alloy. Height 15 cm. V&A: IS.21–1988

veneration rites, which regard kingship as one stage in the Jina's progress through life to liberation.

This concept has close parallels to the Buddhist *cakravartin* (world sovereign, a universal monarch) concept, in which the royal title serves as a metaphor for spiritual overlordship/kingship. The Buddhist sources for celebrating the Buddha in this role indicate the display of worldly riches in the worship of the Buddha image from an early period.[24] This was given devotional expression in the offering of jewels and precious cloths to the image of the Buddha, as narrated by Chinese pilgrims as early as the seventh century.[25] The pilgrim Xuanzang also gives a detailed description of the Bodhgaya Buddha image: after it was carved, the monks put 'a necklace of precious stones and jewels, whilst on the head they placed a diadem of encircling gems, exceedingly rich'.[26] The depiction of the crowned Buddha is first seen at Ajanta with the crown being presented by celestial figures hovering above the Buddha, and again at Karle, another sixth-century rock-cut site. The Buddha wearing the crown and jewels makes its appearance in eastern India in around the eighth and ninth centuries under the patronage of the Pala dynasty (pl.133).

Another worship practice shared by Buddhists and Jains is the veneration of the sacred texts. A second-century sandstone sculpture of Sarasvatī, recovered

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▲ Manuscript cover painted on the interior surface with Buddhist deities: in the centre is the goddess Prajñāpāramitā, suggesting that this was a book cover for an edition of her text, the *Astasahaśrikaprajñāpāramitā*. Five Tārās accompany her, and the Bodhisattvas Padmapāṇi and Mañjuśrī flank the group. A kneeling donor couple venerates the ensemble. Kathmandu, Nepal. 12th century, Early Malla period. V&A: IS.10–1978

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▲ Veneration of a sacred manuscript. A kneeling donor couple, seen right, venerating a cloth-wrapped manuscript displayed on a pedestal stand. These objects of veneration are accompanied by the *saptaratnas* ('seven jewels'), emblems characteristic of a *cakravartin*, intended to embody the treasures of Buddha's teachings. Bodhgaya, Bihar, 11th century. Sandstone. 16.5 x 59 cm. V&A: IS.659–1883. Given by W. Porter

from a Jain context in the Mathura region, depicts the seated goddess holding as her sole attribute a palm-leaf format manuscript (pl.43). This, the earliest depiction of a manuscript in Indian art, confirms that the veneration of the sacred word/text was already an established part of devotional practice in the Kushan period. It also raises questions about how to interpret the goddess: is she a goddess holding a holy book, or a personification of the text she holds, as was the case some centuries later when the Mahāyāna Buddhist text, the *Astasahaśrīkaprajñāpāramitā* ('Perfection of Knowledge'), was personified as the Buddhist goddess of wisdom (pls.134–5). During the annual religious festivals celebrating Sarasvatī, it is still customary for devotees to place books as offerings around an image of the goddess. Both Jains and Buddhists conducted worship of the sacred book. This is the subject depicted in an eleventh-century relief from Bodhgaya (pl.136).

As we have seen, institutional temple worship is highly structured, and has prescribed times for the performance of particular rituals. This holy calendar dictates the ritual life of the temple and the devotional life of the believer. Yet, there were those who rejected this path of salvation, arguing in poetry and song for the path of the *bhakti*:

> To the utterly at-one with Śiva
> there's no dawn
> no new moon
> no noonday
> nor eqinoxes,
> nor sunsets,
> nor full moons;
>
> his front yard
> is the true Benares
> O Rāmanatha.[27]

To the conventional Hindu, Benares, the holiest of sacred places, offered the pilgrim instant access to heaven should he die there. This view was utterly rejected by the *bhakti* saints. As Dasimayya says, you can find 'Benares' in your own front yard.

5

Iconography and Emotion

The power and conviction of Indian temple sculpture is the product of two forces. Firstly, it results from the use of a complex symbolic language that the lay devotee can 'read' without priestly assistance much in the way that Christian iconography was (and still is to a degree) a part of a shared visual language of the populace. Secondly, it is charged with aesthetic qualities that convey – through an appeal to the senses – degrees of emotional states aimed at reaching into the heart of the devotee. This tests the artist's ability to engage with the viewer's emotions. This is of course the universal ingredient that separates mundane imagery from art. In Indian aesthetic theory this quality was formally recognized and defined as the study of *rasa*.

Expressing emotion and aesthetic delight: *rasa* in Indian sculpture

Rasa has a variety of meanings, but can at its simplest be described as the essence of an experience, a state of heightened pleasure or bliss. The concept has had a place in Indian aesthetic theory since Bharata wrote his seminal treatise on the performing arts, the *Nāṭyāśastra*, dating in its present form from around the fourth or fifth century CE. Bharata explained *rasa* as an emotion or sentiment 'capable of being tasted [with pleasure]'.[1] It identifies the satisfaction experienced by a connoisseur when heightened psychological states are evoked through the performing and visual arts. In this essential way *rasa* is analogous to *bhakti*, in that it expresses the ultimate aesthetic experience in just the way that *bhakti* expresses the peak of devotional passion. It is very probable that these parallels are not coincidental, as both concepts were formulated in their present forms in a shared intellectual climate in the second half of the first millennium CE.

The *Nāṭyāśastra* represents the codification of Indian knowledge on the dramatic arts, dance, music and aesthetics. The arts are duly ascribed divine origins: Brahmā is credited with creating dance in order that celestial dancers (*apsarās*) could perform this art for the first time, and Viśvakarman, the divine architect, was instructed to build a dance hall (*maṇḍapa*) in which they could perform. The dance *maṇḍapa* is an integral part of every Hindu temple, as was a troupe of hereditary female temple servants (*devadāsī*, slave of god), whose duties included dancing for the deity (pl.138).[2]

Dance is characterized in the *Nāṭyāśastra* as having two aspects, *nāṭya* (mime) and *nrtya* (pure dance). Both dramatic tools are employed to achieve a powerful mood or emotion – the *rasa* – which combines elements of both the emotional and the aesthetic to achieve a heightened experience. These dramatic devices were employed in devotional and secular contexts. In the context of temple arts, the sculptors and painters were instructed to employ the dramatic tools of stagecraft – gesture, expression, passion and colour – to create their own art. The concept of *rasa* is evoked as the central criterion for high aesthetic achievement in every arena of the arts, visual and performing. In his writings, Bharata identifies

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◀ **Caturmukha Mahādeva (*caturmukhaliṅga*, four-faced *liṅga*), detail. Stone, in situ, Nachna Kuthara, near Bhumara, Madhya Pradesh. 9th century. American Institute of Indian Studies**

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▶ Mural painting depicting celestial dancers celebrating Lord Śiva as Naṭarāja at Chidambaram. Bṛhdahiśvara (Rājarājesvara) temple, Tanjavur, Tamilnadu. Early 11th century, Cola period. Photograph by V.K. Rajamani

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◀ Śiva Natarāja. This dancing form of Śiva conveys the majesty and authority of Śiva as the supreme creator. Śiva displays a series of *mudrās*, hand gestures with specific iconographic meanings. Of his two lower hands, the downturned hand (*gajamudrā*) gestures to the shelter of his raised leg, while the raised hand with exposed palm gives reassurance and protection to the devotee (*abhayamudrā*); his upper-right hand holds the drum (*damarumudrā*), marking time. Tanjavur district, Tamilnadu. Early 10th century, late Pallava–early Chola period. Copper alloy. Height 68.6 cm. V&A: IM.2–1934. Bequest of H. Bradley

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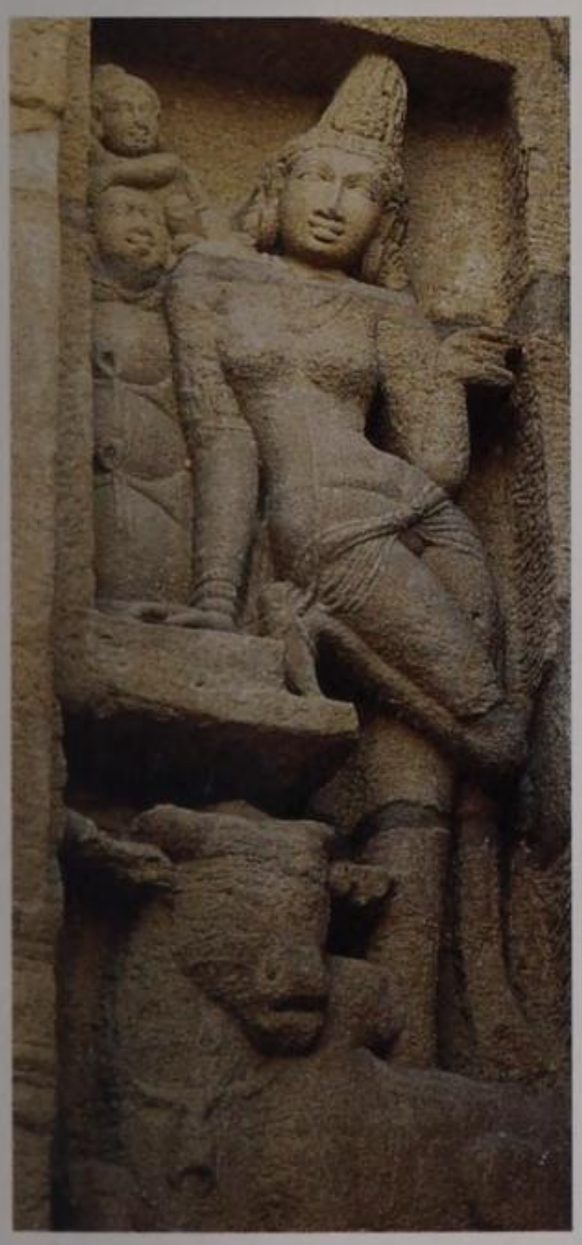
▼ Pārvatī relaxing with Nandi at her feet, waiting for their Lord Śiva. Pārvatī's casual deportment captures the tender and spirited mood of the erotic mood *śringgara*. Relief on the main sanctuary (*vimāna*), Kāilāsanātha temple, Kanchipuram. Early 8th century, Cola period. Photograph by the author



eight 'sentiments', moods or flavours, 'as named by Brahmā'. Each is assigned a name, and we can at once see how these moods translate into the emotional repertoire of Indian sculpture: the erotic (*śringgara*) (pls.140–1), the comic (*hasya*), the pathetic (*karuna*), the furious (*raudra*) (pl.143), the heroic (*vīra*), the terrible (*bhayanaka*), the odious (*bibhasta*) and the marvellous (*adbhuta*) (pls.144–5). Bharata goes on to provide a shortlist of 'durable psychological states' – love, mirth, anger, energy, terror, disgust and astonishment (pl.142) – together with a longer list of thirty-three complementary psychological states and their identifiable states of distress (*sāttvika*), and histrionics conveyed through gesture (*mudrā*).[3] The experience of *rasa* can be generated by any one of the sentiments prevailing, but it will embody elements of many emotional states.

Reviewing the astonishing range of emotions explored through the medium of temple sculpture, it is easy to see how the aesthetic theories devised for the dramatic arts provided a vast repertoire of sentiments that could be given expression in sculpture and painting. The artist could do this in full confidence that the audiences of the day would readily comprehend the intended messages. Bharata does acknowledge that not all will respond equally to the experience of art, and identifies the connoisseur (*rasika*) as the most susceptible to *rasa*. As the fourteenth-century commentator on aesthetics Viśvanātha wrote in his *Sahitya Darpana* ('Mirror of Composition'), 'pure aesthetic experience is theirs in whom the knowledge of ideal beauty is innate; it is known intuitively in intellectual ecstasy'.[4] Arriving at a state of *rasa* is described by Bharata as being the result of a complex dialectic process of complementary elements generating a 'churning of the heart', out of which arises a higher emotional state. He draws the analogy of fine cooking, in which each of the foodstuffs and spices contributes to the pleasurable taste; in the same way each of the emotional moods or sentiments contributes to the total experience of the state of *rasa*. Bharata explains the dynamics of the process further – each mood is seen as linked to another in a causal relationship, hence the eight sentiments arise out of the original four, namely the erotic, furious, heroic and odious. Hence, 'a mimicry of the erotic is called the comic, and the result of the furious is the pathetic, the result of the heroic is called the marvellous, and that which is odious results in the terrible'. Colours are assigned to these emotional states: the erotic is green, the comic white, the pathetic grey, the furious red, the heroic yellow, the terrible black, the odious blue and the marvellous gold. Each of these emotions is then explicitly identified with a prominent Hindu deity:

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▼ A processional icon of Śiva as Bhikṣāṭana (Lord of the Ascetics), the divine ascetic, with skull cup in his hand. Śiva in his form as a wandering mendicant entered a forest hermitage, much to the consternation of the Brahman community, whose wives failed to conceal their desire for the beautiful lord. This subject is unfailingly treated in a highly charged sensual manner, invoking the erotic sentiment of *śringgara*. Svetavaneśvara temple, Tiruvenkadu, Tanjavur District, Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, April 1993

Viṣṇu is the god of the Erotic
Pramathas/Ganas the Comic
Rudra (Śiva) the Furious
Yama the Pathetic
Mahākāla the Odious
Kāla the Terrible
Indra the Heroic
Brahmā the Marvellous [5]

We can therefore readily see the manner in which the moods expressed as *rasa*, developed as an aesthetic theory to explain the power of the dramatic arts, had such immediate application in the visual arts of painting and sculpture. Bharata's sections titled 'Gesture of major and minor limbs' catalogues a repertoire of dramatic gestures and assigns specific emotions to each. Under 'Gestures of the head' is a section 'Glances to express the sentiments' describing in remarkable detail the correct manner in which glances should be used to express specific *rasa*. Witness the glance *bhayanaka* (terrible), in which 'the eyelids are drawn up and fixed, and the eyeballs are gleaming and turning up. It indicates a great fear and is used in the Terrible Sentiment,' or the *raudri* (cruel), 'the pitiless glance in which the eyeballs are rough, red, raised, and the eyelids are still, and the eyebrows knitted. It is used in the Furious Sentiment,' (pl.143). A contrasting expression is *vīra* (heroic), in which 'the glance is bright, fully open, agitated, serious, and in which the eyeballs are at the centre of the eye. It is used in the Heroic Sentiment.'[6] The expression of love ('a loving glance') is conveyed through *snigdha*, the facial expression of tender sweetness (pl.146).

Invaluable to sculptors was the guidance offered on hand gestures and movements of the body's limbs. Sixty-four gestures of the hand (*mudrās*) are described, each intended to convey a specific meaning, either a particular action or an emotion. Not all aspects of Bharata's descriptions of staged body gestures translated readily into static arts – the repeated references to the flashing of eyes (in anger or fear) and the movement of eyelashes, for example – but enough did to enable sculptors and painters to draw much inspiration from the *Nāṭyāśastra*, as the later *śilpaśāstras* extolled them to.

One of the most famous of these texts, the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, compiled around the fifth–seventh centuries, contains in its section the *Citrasūtra,* passages extolling the importance of *rasa* as a quality to be striven for in sculpture and painting. Mimicking the *Nāṭyāśastra*, the commentator cites the same principal sentiments as desirable in painting (and sculpture). The authors of the *Citrasūtra* then proceed to add instructions for the rendering of postures, proportions, charm, detail, faithfulness to nature, foreshortening and so on. It states that

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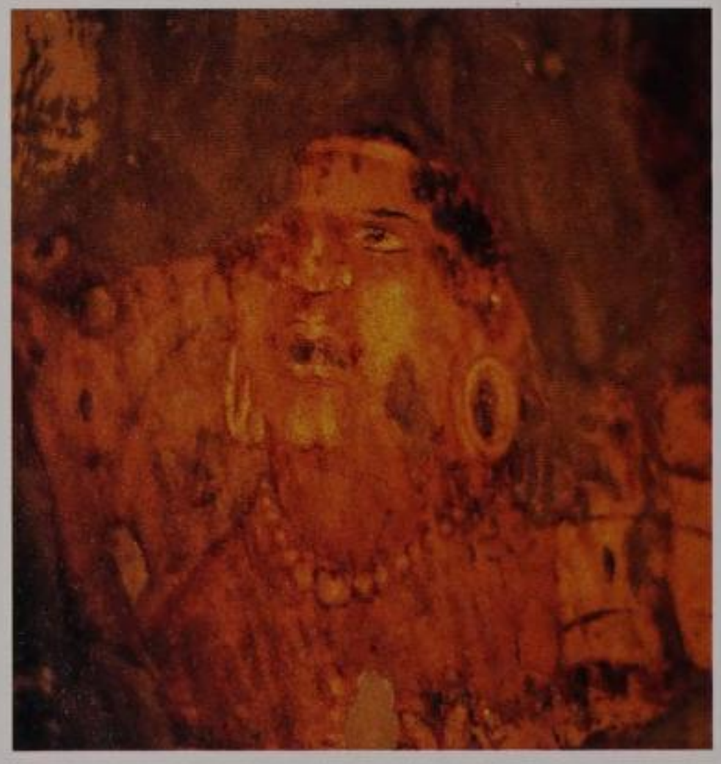
▶ Mural painting depicting a woman expressing astonishment, embodied in the pathetic mood of *karuna*. Ajanta, Maharasthra. 6th century, Vakataka dynasty. Photograph by the author, 1981



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▲ Śiva slaying Andhaka, embodying the fury and anger of the *raudra* sentiment. Rock-cut relief, Elephanta, Maharasthra, *c.*550, Vakataka dynasty. American Institute of Indian Studies

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◀ Sadāśiva. The supreme expression of Śiva's divine form, each face expressing a contrasting mood or sentiment. On the left is Śiva as the fearsome form of Śiva's *aghora* aspect, opposite are the soft features of the feminine aspect of Śiva's nature, Vāmadeva-Pārvatī, and in the centre is the divinely calm and meditative Śiva as the supreme yogi Mahādeva. Rock-cut relief, Elephanta, Maharasthra, *c.*550, Vakataka dynasty. American Institute of Indian Studies

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▶ Buddha Śākyamuni seated in *bhūmisparśamudrā*. The Buddha represented in this posture is calling the earth (goddess) to witness his unshaken calm in the face of Māra's wrath and temptations. This Buddha conveys the mastery of supreme yogic discipline. The effect is to create an image at which to marvel (*adbhuta rasa*). This monumental image would have occupied a sanctuary in one of the many large monastic complexes in medieval Bihar. Found in northern Bihar. 11th–12th century, Pala period. Black schist. Height 1.18 m. V&A: IM.112–1916. Given by the Architectural Association

a work of art has failed that lacks good postures, likeness or *sentiments* (*rasa*).[7] The achievement of *rasa*, then, was a necessary component of a praiseworthy painting or sculpture from at least the latter part of the first millennium CE.

The technical manuals (*śāstras*) pertaining to the visual arts are thus generally accepted to have grown out of a dialogue with those written to direct the dramatic arts, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Not all works of art are necessarily imbued with sufficient levels of emotion to allow them to achieve *rasa*. The language of symbolic action, central to the dramatic arts, carried over into the pictorial language of the representational arts of painting and sculpture. Because the sculptor has to achieve his dramatic message in a single statement, expressed as an action frozen in time, he has to achieve a heightened level of expressiveness. Thus temple sculptures tend to more often reach a higher aesthetic and dramatic level than painting, which often settles for verisimilitude, nature as seen in a mirror. To achieve its full theatrical potential, temple sculpture must embody, in a distilled form, the essence of dramatic action. Anything less and what is achieved is merely narrative, three-dimensional storytelling. In either case, the ability of a temple icon or relief-sculpture is also dependent for its impact on the knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and iconography that the viewer-devotee brings to the encounter.

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▶ Śiva and Pārvatī (Umāmaheśvara), with Śiva represented as Vyakhyāna-Dakṣiṇāmūrti, the divine exponent of the *śāstras*. The divine couple embody in gesture and expression the 'loving glance' of the *snigdha* mood. Probably Jagesvar, Almora District, Uttar Pradesh. 9th century, Katyuri period. Grey-green stone. Height 44 cm. V&A: IS.113–1986

Reading the signs

The emergence of a complex set of iconographic forms in religious sculpture reflected a need to make manifest complex ideas and abstract notions of divinity and divine power. Much of this imagery demanded expression in supra-human form, with gods displaying multiple arms and heads, or metamorphosing into hybrid creatures, part human and part animal. Essentially these representations were the result of early attempts to give physical form to both complex abstract ideas and imagery evoked in creation myths. Usually this resulted from a desire to convey the multi-dimensional personality of the deity, as vividly witnessed in the earliest representation of Śiva in androgynous form, Ardhanārīśvara, which appear in the early Kushan period (pl.157). This image has less to do with sexual ambiguity and more with inclusiveness, Śiva as the all-embracing god who encompasses all aspects of the male and female in his personality, capable of creating and sustaining the universe.[8]

This is most sublimely represented in the large rock-cut relief version of this subject in the mid-sixth-century Cave 1 at Elephanta, near Mumbai. The generous use of the flexed posture (*bhaṅga*) allows the female aspect to prevail. This feminine aspect of Śiva's personality is also given milder expression as the left face of the monumental Sadāśiva relief at Elephanta, where the gentle features of Vāmadeva-Pārvatī align with the meditative and serenely majestic Śiva Mahādeva in the centre, and both contrast with the wrathful *ugra* aspect on the right (pl.144). Each of the faces depicted embodies a different emotional state or *rasa*. This rock-cut masterpiece is arguably the quintessential expression in Indian religious art of the concept of Śiva as his Ultimate Form, five aspects concentrated into one. The Elephanta Sadāśiva depicts three aspects, the fourth (behind) and fifth (upper) are conceptually present but are implied, not depicted. In this form, Śiva follows the concept of the *pañcamukhaliṅga* (five-faced *liṅga*), the most ancient and complete artistic expression of Śiva's unknowable form (see pp.137–41). This sculpture remains the greatest anthropomorphic representation of Śiva known to us.

Deities are represented according to a given set of conventions as defined by the *śāstric* literature (see Chapter 2). Essentially, the deities are represented in four modes:

1. Meditative (yogic) (pls.144–5)
2. Pleasurable (*bhoga*), enjoying worldly pleasures, and central to *bhakti* cults
3. Heroic (*vīra*), the favourite of kings and warriors
4. Terrifying (*abhicārika*) (pls.148–9 and 152)

Accordingly, they must observe specific postures, gestures, ornaments and bodily and facial expressions appropriate to their roles. Postures are specified. Deities are represented either standing (*sthānaka*, straight or flexed), or seated (*āsana*), sometimes on a designated animal that serves as their vehicle (*vāhana*). Very occasionally they are depicted reclining (*śayana*), as in the case of Visnu in his cosmic sleep on the serpent Sena, or prostrate, as Śiva trampled beneath Kālī, or the Buddha's passing into *nirvāṇa*. Other postures are designated for specific devotional goals. Deities seated in *rājalīlāsana* are worshipped by those seeking a boon of worldly satisfactions; a seated *yogāsana* posture is worshipped by those seeking self-realization (*yoga*) and liberation (*mokṣa*). Other deities are seated in a manner to help in overcoming and destroying one's enemies. In this latter form, the animal vehicle (*vāhana*) is replaced by a demon (*rākṣasa*), and so on. In all, some eighty-four *āsanas* are specified in the *śastric* literature.

Hand and arm gestures (*mudrās* and *hastas*) play an important role in

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▼ Door guardian (*dvārapāla*), one of a pair flanking a temple sanctuary entrance. Kerala, south India. *c.*17th–18th century. Polychromed wood. Height 128 cm. V&A: IS. 22–1980

communicating the deity's message, and employ the language of gesture borrowed from dance (pl.139). These are shared by deities of all faiths in India. The most universal hand gesture is that of *abhayamudrā*, in which the deity extends protection to the devotee with an upturned hand, palm exposed (pls.54 and 58). Next is that of *varadamudrā*, the granting of boons or blessings; here the hand is down-turned, also with the palm exposed to the devotee. The Hindu repertoire is not so extensive, nor is that of Jainism, in which the twenty-four meditating *tīrthaṇkaras* have little need of a large language of gesture. Rather, it is the Buddhists, with their emphasis on didactic instruction and the use of narrative, who most developed the use of the meaningful hand gesture. There is a great number of these gestures, many of which are associated specifically with the more 'advanced' schools of Buddhism, especially Vajrayāna. The latter share much of the more esoteric gestural vocabulary with Hindu ritual and Tantrism.

The hand positions are often supplemented by the holding of sets of attributes. This is universally the case in Hinduism, and in some Buddhist contexts. These can be symbolic indicators of intangibles, such as the Vajra 'thunderbolt' sceptre associated with early storm gods and inherited by Indra, and by Vajrapāni in the Buddhist context. Some are symbols of the deities' nature, as in the lotus (*padma*), especially favoured in a Buddhist context as a symbol of purity. Most typically, however, these attributes are associated with combat – Viṣṇu's discus (*cakra*) is a battle weapon to be feared, as is the sound of the conch trumpeted on the battlefield to instil fear into the enemy. Śiva sports his *triśūla*, with which he slays his crazed errant son Andhaka as portrayed at Elephanta and Ellora (pl.143), and Durgā displays all the divine weapons lent her by the male gods to defeat the demon Mahiṣa (pl.152).

These attributes all serve as symbolic identifiers, and reflect or allude to the god's identity. Very occasionally the attributes are represented in human form, as in the anthropomorphic personification of Viṣṇu's weapons (*āyudhapurusa*), the Cakrapuruṣa, the discus personified as a man and Gadādevī, the female personified club. More typically, it is the personifications of nature that accompany the deity. Hence we see medieval representations of Sūrya the Vedic sun god flanked by attendants and guardians and at his feet, the diminutive figure of his principal consort Prabhā (Brightness, rays of light); he is served by two female archers, Usa and Pratyūsa, who personify dawn and drive off the hosts of the night (frontispiece).

A number of systems has come into operation for the classification of Indian religious imagery. Central to these are notions of hierarchy, in which one god prevails and to whom others defer. This results in a central god and a cast of secondary deities to whom devotion can be directed, according to the devotee's

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▶ Mahākāla, a wrathful and vengeful manifestation of Śiva Bhairava, whose name means 'The Great Destroyer [of Time]'. Mahākāla has flames emanating from his head and wears as jewellery entwined snakes and a garland of human skulls. He tramples remorselessly on a corpse while wielding a skull-cup, flaying knife and skull-mounted trident (*triśūla*). He embodies fearsomeness. Vajrayāna Buddhism quickly adopted him as their wrathful guardian par excellence, and this imagery was transmitted to Tibetan Buddhism. Eastern India, possibly Orissa. 12th century, Eastern Ganga period. Basalt. Height 109 cm. V&A: IM.10–1930

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▼ Bhairava, Śiva's dreadful and violent *ugra* emanation, is widely worshipped in Nepal. He is especially celebrated during the annual Indra-*jatra* festival, when images such as this one are exposed to the public. Kathmandu, Nepal. 17th century, Malla period. Repoussé copper with gilding and paint, and inset with stones. Height 69 cm. V&A: IM.172–1913

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◀ The monumental effigy of Mariyamman, a form of Kālī associated with smallpox, being paraded during the Panguni Uttiram festival, Śrī Kapaliśvara temple, Mylapore, Chennai. Bunches of *bilva* leaves, sacred to Śiva, are offered to the goddess. This deity is brought from elsewhere and never enters the temple: she is the awesome outsider, whose powers must be tamed through offerings, whereupon she performs as protectress of children. Photograph by the author, March 2003

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▶ Karaikkal-Ammaiyar, the 6th-century female Śaiva poet-saint who achieved her emaciated state after beseeching Śiva to free her from her all worldly encumbrances, including her great bodily beauty. He granted her wish and she spent her days as an emaciated old woman singing Śiva's praise, accompanied only by her hand cymbals. Tamilnadu. 13th century, late Cola period. Copper alloy. Height 25 cm. V&A: IM.118–1924

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▲ Kālī in her ten-armed form, seated on a lotus, accompanied by her lion *vāhana* and trampling a prostrate male figure. Together with Pārvatī, Ambikā and Durgā, Kālī is one of the central goddesses of the *śakta* (divine energy) cult. This late bronze image captures the cosmic energy and wide-eyed fury of Kālī, 'the Destroyer of Time'. Iconographically, this sculpture is very close to the imagery of Kālī at her temple in Chidambaram, Tillai Amman. Tamilnadu. 19th century, Nayak period. V&A: IS. 77–1948

needs. The system translated directly into the sculptural programmes that embellished the temple facade. It operated on two levels, the first being that of the overall sculptural programme, with its clearly expressed hierarchy of divinities and lesser beings, with rank expressed by relative proximity to the sanctum (*garbhagṛha*), by directional orientation and by relative scale. The second sculptural context for the expression of hierarchy is within the sculptural stele itself. The elaboration of the back-plate as an integral and vital part of the icon's composition became a prominent feature from the Gupta period, and was at its most fully elaborated by the medieval period.[9] The fixing of the cult image on the vertical centreline of the stele, surrounded by a complex configuration of animals and creatures divine and semi-divine, all point to the icon being conceived as a replica temple, a replica universe.

In some compositions, especially in eastern Indian temple sculpture of the Pala period, this is made explicit through the extensive use of architectural detailing (pls.1, 133). The hierarchy is indicated by the progression from lesser beings, such as minor gods, *yakśas* and donors depicted at the feet of the deity, to more senior gods and personifications honoured to serve as attendants. Next are creatures projecting from behind the central deity symbolizing the life elements: elephants (earth), leogryphs, lions (strength) and *makara* (water), which serve as guardians; above them hover celestial celebrants, garland-bearers and musicians, occupying the sky (air). At the apex of the composition is a protective framing device, typically a *kīrttimukha* ('face of glory'), reminding the devotee that the sculptural icon serves as a sanctuary, a place for spiritual shelter. This is an extension of the body as temple concept explored in Chapter 3, whereby the sculptural icon itself can serve as the 'temple'. Again, it is the ideas of multiplicity and replication at work, and the overarching notion that the temple is where god chooses it to be, from a monumental celestial palace on earth, to an icon, to the devotee's heart.

6

Manifestations and Appearances

All of the supreme Hindu deities have the capacity to determine the form in which they reveal themselves on earth. Śiva, Viṣṇu and Devī each appear in myriad forms, and potentially the number is without limit. Conventionally it is understood that Śiva has assumed twenty-eight manifestations, and Viṣṇu ten. Devī subsumes unto herself all goddess cults, so her forms are already beyond knowledge.

As observed in Chapter 1, many of the major Brahmanical deities have their origins in the pantheon of gods identified in the Vedas, undergoing metamorphoses with the passage of time. Perhaps the oldest records of continuous worship relate to Śiva and Rudra, his Vedic forerunner. Rudra, an awesome Vedic storm deity whose name is variously interpreted as the 'howler', the 'terrible' or the 'frightful', is praised as the bringer of rains and more generally associated with fertility and the generative process, a role assumed by Śiva in later periods. Vedic hymns in praise of Rudra speak of giving homage to 'the turbaned wanderer', 'the wearer of knotted locks', 'the auspicious one', the latter phrase becoming an epithet for Śiva.[1] Rudra came to embody the terrifying dimension of Śiva's personality. Links with cattle – Rudra is sometimes titled 'Lord of the Cattle' – suggest very early origins for this deity, associating him with pre-Aryan pastoral settlement of the subcontinent (pls.155–6). Śiva's calf-bull, traditionally named Nandi (see Chapter 3), can be seen as an acknowledgement of this ancestry, as well as being emblematic of Śiva's progenerative powers.

Two cult images emerged early in the formative stages of the Brahmanical pantheon to become the paramount icons of temple Hinduism. They are the Śiva *liṅga*, and the anthropomorphic representation of Viṣṇu.

Śiva *liṅga*

The earliest recorded stone *liṅgas* typically display five distinctive characteristics. Firstly, they are very large, up to 1.5 metres in height. Secondly, most display a tripartite sectioning. Thirdly, they are anatomically explicit, making it clear that they represent the erect male phallus (whatever the underlying metaphysical meaning). Fourthly, some of them are addorsed with one or more faces of Śiva in his various guises, and fifthly, they often have a decorative floral band drawn around the head of the *liṅga*. These are the essential features, some or all of which are found in all subsequent forms of the Śiva *liṅga*.

The symbolic intent of the various features, and of the *liṅga* itself, has been the subject of intense debate; suffice to say here that the Śiva *liṅga* was intended from its conception to function on two levels: on a metaphysical, transcendental plain it represents the subtle, unknowable and unseen godhead, while on a physical level its anatomical allusions refer to Śiva's capacity to generate life through his cosmic energy.[2] The pillar has conceptual parallels with the *stambha*, the post or column that serves as a medium for linking the mundane/material world and the heavenly/cosmic sphere. This aspect of *liṅga* imagery is made explicit in a later myth – the

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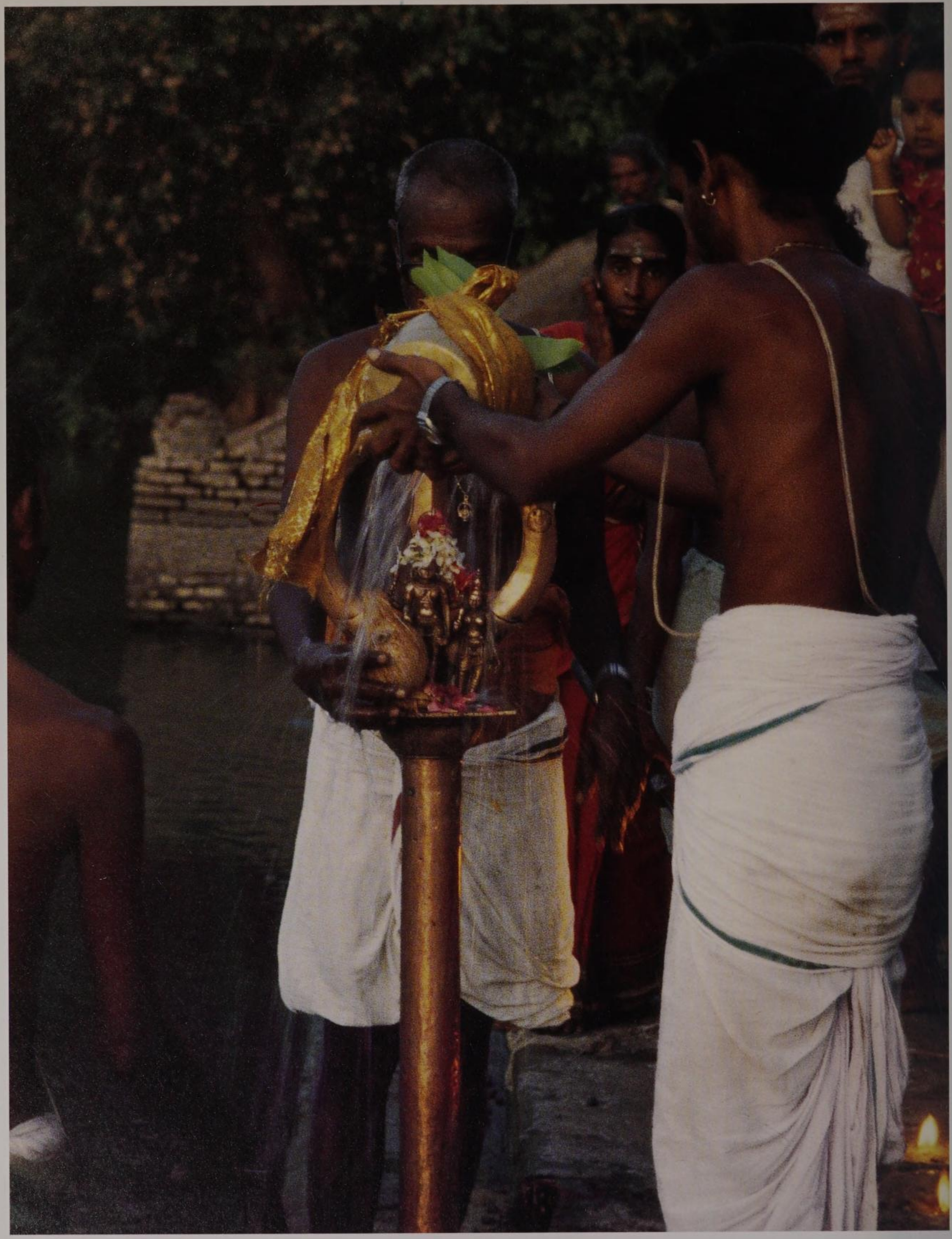
◀ A priest performing a *liṅga-pūjā* at a temple in Varanasi. He is lustrating the five-faced metal cover (*pañcamukhaliṅga kosa*) that envelops the stone *liṅga*. Photograph by Frank Monaco. V&A: IS. 155-2006. Given by Frank Monaco



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◀ A portable icon of Śiva, a *triśūla* adorned with the image of Śiva Vrsavāhana, being ritually washed with the waters of the Kaveri River, the climax of the festival procession of the Svetavaneśvara temple, Tiruvenkadu, Tanjavur District, Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, April 1993

liṅgodbhavamūrti – that reflects the sectarian rivalries between the three leading contenders in an emergent Hinduism, Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu, from which Śiva emerges triumphant after having extended his flaming *liṅga* form to infinite heights and depths, beyond the reach of his rivals.

These representations of Śiva began appearing in around the second to the first centuries BCE, in the Śunga period. Although they have been found predominantly in the Ganges-Yamuna plains of northern India centred on Mathura, 'the city of the gods', they also occur at sites widely dispersed across northern India and the Deccan, from Rajasthan (Bharatpur) to Andhra Pradesh (Gudimallam). Significantly, these centres were all linked through early overland trade routes, of which Mathura was the principal node. Ujjain, Ter and Nagpur were important centres to the west and south, and Pataliputra (modern Patna) to the east (see map, p.10).

Among the earliest representations is the most complex form of all, the *pañcamukhaliṅga*, the five-faced *liṅga*, the five-fold form denoting metaphysical completeness (pl.153). This exists as five *mantras*, each evoking in its sound an aspect of total reality, and emitting from the *liṅga* in the five directions. At some point this concept was given physical expression in sculpted stone as the *liṅga* with five faces. In what is widely accepted as the oldest surviving version of this subject – the Bhita *liṅga*, dated by inscription to around the beginning of the first millennium CE[3] – all five faces are represented: the four directional faces and the fifth face, that of Isāna-Rudra-Śiva at the summit, presiding over the other forms in a three-dimensional cosmology drawn directly from Vedic ritual. From the outset, the multiple faces on these *liṅga* are differentiated, conveying the complex metaphysical concept this image embodied. The four cardinal directions are identified: the east is Tatpuruṣa (the original creator), the south Aghora (the wrathful), the west Sadyojāta (the majestic) and the north Vāmadeva (the gentle). The fifth head, Isāna (the ruler, lord over all), was rarely represented, but its presence was always assumed.

The practice of lustrating the *liṅga*, an essential component of *liṅga-pūjā*, directly flows from Vedic ritual practices in which the dreadful power of Rudra is pacified with offerings of goat's milk and the chanting of prayers.[4] Already by the Kushan period, in the early centuries of the first millennium, the fifth face was rarely represented, but nonetheless understood to be present. From around the second century CE we see a single-faced *liṅga* – *ekhamukhaliṅga* – become the norm in the later Kushan and Gupta eras and into the medieval period (pl.157). Even here, the five aspects are conceptually present, but implied rather than represented. At another level, the face/s emanating from the shaft of a *liṅga* can be seen as the first part of divine manifestation (first the head, as in birth), leading to full anthropomorphic display.[5] This is witnessed most sublimely at Gudimallam (pl.39), and seen a few centuries later at Mathura.[6]

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▲ Seal depicting a holy man, with cow-horn headdress and mask, in yogic meditation and surrounded by wild beasts, perhaps a proto-Rudra as 'Lord of the Wild Animals' (Paśupati). Mohenjo Daro, Indus Valley, Pakistan. 2300–1750 BCE. Steatite. National Museum, New Delhi

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▶ Seal depicting a standing bull and pictograms. The bull is a regular motif in imagery from the Harappan civilization, preserved principally on intaglio seals. The pictographic script remains undeciphered. Mohenjo Daro, Indus Valley, Pakistan. 2300–1750 BCE. Steatite. Height 1.27 cm. V&A: IS.8:1–1951

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◀ The single-faced *liṅga* (*ekhamukhaliṅga*), icon of Śiva. The face has a prominent moustache, clearly defined third eye and upward-swept coiffure, all features of the Gupta style. Mathura region, Uttar Pradesh. Mid-5th century, Gupta period. Red sandstone. Height 58.5 cm. V&A: IS.10–1969

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▼ Ardhanārīśvara, 'the Lord (Śiva) who is Half-Woman', addorsed to a *liṅga*. The bisexual figure is divided vertically, and on the reverse is an angry (*ugra*) face, perhaps intended to represent Rudra. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. Late 2nd century, Kushan period. Sandstone. Height 27 cm. V&A: IM.5–1931

The anthropomorphic *liṅga* of Gudimallam points to another important development in the early iconographic manifestation of Śiva. This was the Sadāśiva/Maheśvara representation, in which Śiva assumes supra-human form. This can take a number of variant forms, not all of which survive beyond the early medieval period. A number of stone anthropomorphic Sadāśiva icons survive from the Vakataka centre of Mandhal, near Nagpur, Madhya Pradesh, with multiple heads (four or eight) and further heads emanating from his shoulders and thighs.[7] In the ultimate declaration of supreme manifestation, Śiva is represented in multiple human forms, as in the masterpiece of sixth-century Vakataka devotional imagery, the astonishing Śiva Sadāśiva Saptamurti, the seven-fold Ever-lasting Śiva, in the rock-cut Candikadevi temple at Parel, near Mumbai.[8] This supreme manifestation had its Vaiṣṇava iconographic equivalent in the equally complex Viśvarūpa images that appeared in the later first millennium across northern India and in Licchavi, Nepal. These complex iconographic programmatic compositions did not prove popular and soon lapsed in favour of single-figure cult images. Curiously, it is in the arena of Mahayānist Buddhist iconography that multi-formed images of this complexity survived, as seen for example in the eleven-headed Avalokiteśvara in Cave 41 at Kankeri, and they persist in the cult images of this Buddhist *Bodhisattva* of compassion, and in images of the cosmological Buddha, seen both in India and elsewhere in Buddhist Asia.[9]

Śiva's manifestations

Śiva is the most complex of all the deities, assuming twenty-eight conventionally recognized forms. Nonetheless, his many manifestations are integral and vital to the mythology of Śiva and to understanding his complex and flawed personality. Unlike the *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, which are divine appearances of equal importance, for devotees of Śiva one form, the *liṅga*, is supremely sacred. Śiva's many other forms do not challenge the supremacy of Śiva's ultimate 'sign', the literal meaning of the Sanskrit *liṅga*. It is erect, full of life-giving potential (semen) withheld by yogic discipline. It is Śiva as ascetic yogic, Śiva Yogeśvara.

Śiva the Great Yogi draws on ancient forms. Yogic asceticism is signalled on a small Harappan seal relief from Mohenjo Daro of the late third millennium BCE (pl.155). There the yogi is seated in *siddha āsana*, and with an erect penis (*ūrdhva-liṅga*), surrounded by four animals, tiger, elephant, rhinoceros and buffalo. These animals also appear individually on other seal reliefs, indicating that they had a cult-like importance in their own right. The yogi wears buffalo-horn headgear and is seated on a throne with bovine legs, thus infusing him with the qualities of nobility and strength associated with that beast; his posture indicates that he embodies yogic powers. While it cannot be claimed that this figure is a proto-Śiva – nothing is

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▶ Śiva Kirātārjunamūrti, the hunter. In this form, Śiva disguised himself as a hunter in order to test the prowess of Arjuna. Śiva's associations with hunting are ancient and link him to Rudra, the wild hunter who presided over the forest animals and was given the title Paśupati, 'Lord of the Wild Animals', an epithet later assumed by Śiva. Kerala. 15th–16th century. Copper alloy. Height 29.5 cm. V&A: IS.43–1887

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▶ Tapasvini Pārvatī. Pārvatī performing yogic austerities in order to win the favour of Śiva. She stands on one leg and above her head she holds the *rudrākśa* bead rosary (*mālā*), made from fruit berries sacred to Śiva. The position of the rosary is reminiscent of the 5th-century Durgā holding up a victory wreath at Cave 6, Udayagiri (pl.165). This display of the beads may allude to Pārvatī 's 'victory' in overcoming Śiva's asceticism. Pārvatī is surrounded by four altar fires, emblematic of the testing nature of her penance. Recovered from the Palnad Taluga region, Kistna River, Andhra Pradesh. 9th–10th century, Chalukyan period. Limestone. Height 45 cm. V&A: IM.298–1914

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▼ Śiva. Fragmentary stele depicting Śiva in anthropomorphic form, and with erect phallus. Maharashra, possibly vicinity of Ellora or the Aurangabad Caves. 7th century, Chalukya period. Basalt. Height 73 cm. V&A: IM.13–1915

known of the religious ideas of this time – it is clear that many of the concepts recognizable in the later *yoga* system are already present. These contributed to the Śiva Yogeśvara concept, of which the erect penis is a cognitive sign. Further evidence is contained in the *Ṛgveda*, where the wrathful wild hunter god Rudra was given the title Paśupati, 'Lord of Wild Animals', a favoured epitaph for Śiva in later times. The bull is associated with many of the Vedic gods, but in the Brahmanical period is specifically linked with Rudra-Śiva, as first witnessed on a gold coin of the late-first-century AD Kushan ruler Vima Kadphhises.[10] These two signs, the aroused Śiva and the attendant bull, are to be seen in a number of Kushan and early Gupta period sculptures of Umāsahitamūrti (Śiva and Umā) and the androgynous Śiva• Ardhanārīśvara, where the calf-bull Nandi nestles behind his lord.[11]

Śiva Yogeśvara reaches its ultimate expression at Elephanta in the sixth century BCE (pl.144). This is an expression of Śiva's essential nature, the master of yogic discipline, from which all else is possible. Śiva the transcendental yogi in turn assumes a number of closely related forms as the original teacher of yoga, the Supreme Guru, Yoga Dakṣiṇamurti, and as the teacher of knowledge, music and all the arts. In the medieval period Śiva Dakṣiṇamurti assumes a prominent place in temple sculptural programmes, particularly in south India, as the lord who faces south (pl.80).

Śiva is much adored as the lover and husband of Pārvatī. The divine marriage – Kalyāṇasundara – is a popular subject, as witnessed at Elephanta, and is often given local significance, as seen most movingly at Madurai, in Śiva's marriage to the local goddess Mīnākṣī. Seated together in royal ease they are known as Umā Maheśvara, the Great Lord and Great Goddess as wedded divine lovers. They are usually shown with one or more of their children, Gaṇeśa and Skanda, and with Nandi the calf-bull (pls.162–3). When depicted just with Skanda, the 'holy family' are known as Somāskanda, a representation uniquely included in the interior back wall of the temple sanctum (*garbhagṛha*) of Pallava shrines (pl.82). The subject continued to be popular into the Cola period, especially represented in processional bronzes (pl.106). The married love of Śiva and Pārvatī was not without its problems, much of them caused by Śiva's yogic asceticism. Pārvatī successfully attracted Śiva's attention by herself mastering advanced asceticism and the performing of extreme austerities (pl.160), but despite protracted lovemaking Śiva would not shed his seed. Procreation only happened in a later age. Śiva also took a second wife – Pārvatī's sister, the irascible river goddess Gaṅgā – much to Pārvatī's chagrin (see Gaṅgā, p.169 – 70).

Śiva's ambiguous attitude to assuming the role of divine husband rests in part in Śiva's nature, which encompasses all aspects, male and female. This finds its most complete expression in Śiva Ardhanārīśvara, 'the Lord who is Half-Woman', the right side male, the left female (pl.158). On one level this can be read as a syncretism of Śiva and Śakti (female personification of a male god's energy) cults. The cosmological account is as follows: Śiva was born from the mind of Brahmā, and at Brahmā's command Śiva was split so that Umā was created out of his other half. According to the Book of Manu (I, 32–3), most probably composed in the Kushan period: 'Dividing his own body, the Lord became half male and half female; with that (female) he produced Viraj. But know me, O most holy one among the twice-born, to be the creator of this whole (world).'

Essentially, Śiva reveals himself through the symbol of sexual bi-unity, as he embodies both aspects. Hence Ardhanārīśvara is a statement of inclusiveness, of the completeness of Śiva's creation. As the *Bhagavata Purāna* says, he is both seed and womb, the instruments of making life. Yet, paradoxically, Śiva in this form, two in a single form, cannot procreate in the mortal sense. Rather than being

a manifestation, this revelation of Śiva is a symbol of his omnipotence, and so is the closest conceptually of any of the Śiva icons to the *liṅga* form itself.

Śiva's creative energy is given its most complete expression in his form as Nateśa, Lord of Dance, in which he creates, sustains, destroys and again regenerates the universe. The enactment of this cosmic dance is most fully and vividly described in the ninth-century Sanskrit text *Haravijaya*, written as an epic for recitation at court by the Kashmiri poet Ratnakara.[12] Śiva dances in many forms; the one most frequently represented in sculptural form is that of *ānanda tāṇḍava* (fierce dance of bliss), where he assumes the posture with raised leg and downward-pointing hand, as Naṭarāja the Supreme Dancer, creator and dispenser of grace to his devotees (pl.114). This complex cosmological imagery, first given its full treatment at Aihole (Ravana Phadi Cave), Badami (Cave 1), Ellora (Cave 21) and Elephanta, became the principal form of Śiva for processional bronze images in Cola, south India.[13] It is an image dear to Śaiva devotees (*bhaktas*): 'Śiva dances the dance of bliss [*ānanda tāṇḍava*] in the hall of consciousness [Chit Sabha, at Chidambaram] within the heart of man.'[14]

Roused, the wrath of Śiva was feared by all, even his beloved Pārvatī. Śiva's angered forms are many. Śiva reduced the God of Love, Kama, to ash with a flame from his third eye for the crime of having disturbed his meditation. In one of his dance forms, Gajantaka, he kills and flays an elephant demon and then dances in victory displaying the animal's skin as a trophy. In another – that described in the ninth-century *Haravijaya* cited above – he kills his wayward son Andhaka with his *triśūla* in fury after his offspring attempts to seduce Pārvatī, a subject represented in large rock-cut relief panels at both Elephanta and Ellora (Cave 29). Śiva in these forms shows the *aghora* – dreadful and wrathful – aspect of his nature.

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▶ **Śiva and Pārvatī, accompanied by Gaṇeśa and Nandi. This lively image, in which Śiva and Pārvatī appear to be engaged in animated conversation, is dominated by the splendid *triśūla*, Śiva's trident, festively decorated. South-eastern Bengal, possibly Chittagong region, Bangladesh. 9th century, Pala period. Copper alloy. Height 15 cm. V&A: IS.854**

Śiva has an expressly dreadful form, that of Bhairava. He first assumed this form after, in anger and fury, decapitating Brahmā's fifth head. In repentance of this unspeakable sin, Śiva wandered the earth as an agonized and sometimes deranged mendicant, using Brahmā's skull as his begging bow and accompanied by a dog, the scavenger of graveyards. Only in Varanasi was he cleansed of this sin (by the Ganges) and found release from his nightmare. As the embodiment of terror, Bhairava is invoked in rituals intended to destroy one's enemies. Śiva as the naked wandering ascetic also assumes a benign form, that of Bhikṣāṭana, the penitent god as the Supreme Beggar, whose naked beauty aroused the wives and daughters of sages he met at a forest hermitage (pl.141); Śiva the ascetic remained unmoved by their advances. These two forms of Śiva as a wandering beggar, one agonized and full of dread, the other sublimely restrained, both allude to Śiva as the supreme master of yogic discipline. The Bhairava form is Śiva's punishment for failing to display the yogic discipline necessary to contain his fury, which lead to him committing the ultimate sin, decapitating his father/creator. Śiva as the Supreme Beggar exhibits the triumph of yogic discipline over sexual desire, as seen in his Yogeśvara form.

Vasudeva/Viṣṇu

Viṣṇu emerged out of the synthesis of a Vedic solar deity and an early warrior-hero worshipped as Vasudeva. The name of Vasudeva first appears in the second-century BCE inscription on the Besnagar pillar, found near Bhilsa (ancient Vidisa). This pillar, identified in its Brahmī inscription as a *garuḍadhvaja* (standard in honour of *Garuḍa*), records the conversion to the Vasudeva cult of a Greek (Yavana) ambassador from west Asia.[15] This unique record, presumably erected by this

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▶ Ūma-maheśvara. Śiva and Pārvatī, accompanied by Nandi. The divine couple are seated on a cushion-throne draped with a tiger skin. Śiva engages in exposition as the supreme guru while tenderly holding his spouse. Both display elaborate jewellery and diadems, Śiva's enhanced with the crescent moon and skull emblems. Nandi intrudes his head from behind the group, as if listening alertly to his lord's words. Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. 10th century, Licchavi period. Copper alloy, gilded and inlaid with stones. Height 16 cm. V&A: IS.54–1985

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▶ Mahādeva, Śiva as the supreme god. Processional mask (*mohra*) used to adorn portable shrines during religious festivals in the hill regions of Himachal Pradesh. Sutlej Valley, Himachal Pradesh. 9th–10th century. Brass with electrum inlay. Height 33 cm. V&A: IS.115–1985

devotee adjacent to a shrine dedicated to Vasudeva, can be seen as marking the beginning of the recorded history of devotional worship – *bhakti* – in the subcontinent. As noted by J.N. Banerjea, it also provides evidence that the converging of the Vasudeva Bhagavata (devotional) cult and the Vedic Viṣṇu cults was already well under way, as witnessed by the column identified with *Garuḍa*, the Vedic concept of the sun as a 'beautiful-winged divine bird'. From the same period, we witness on the ceremonial gateway (*toraṇa*) of *Stūpa 3* at Sanchi, Madhya Pradesh, a vignette of a warrior-hero in west Asian dress slaying a dragon-*makara*, a prototype of a later depiction of Viṣṇu slaying the horse demon Keshi and subduing the Nagarāja Kāliya.

Early in his anthropomorphic development, Vasudeva assumes a two-armed form (pl.165), also seen on the Agathocles coin,[16] but he is more commonly depicted with four arms, holding the discus (*cakra*) and the club (*gadā*) in the upper hands, and making a protective gesture with the lower hands, which hold the conch shell (*śaṅkha*). The four-armed form evolved into a Vasudeva-Kṛṣṇa and finally into the fully developed Viṣṇu in the late Kushan and Gupta periods.[17] Whereas the second right hand displays henceforward the gesture of giving, it also holds a round attribute, which has been variously identified as an image of the earth, or as a fruit, though without any textual authority. In the Gupta period also, the *gadā* and *cakra* in turn assumed human form on occasions, becoming anthropomorphic

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▶ Relief sculptures at Cave 6, depicting (from left to right) Viṣṇu, two door guardians flanking the entrance, Viṣṇu and Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī. Viṣṇu wears a lion-crown and victory garland, and stands with his lower hands clasping his weapons, the discus (*cakra*) and club (*gadā*), appearing for the first time in personified form (*āyudhapuruṣas*). Together with the Varāha images at the same site (pl. 173), this series of sculptures represents the most important ensemble of Gupta-period sculpture preserved in situ. Udayagiri, Vidisa, Madhya Pradesh. Early 5th century, western Ksatrapa period. American Institute of Indian Studies

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▼ Viṣṇu wearing a tripartite diadem surmounted by a sun emblem, with sashes fluttering outwards on the halo, reminiscent of Iranian models. He is draped with a lavish flower garland (*mālācakha*), which loops below his knees. Mathura, Uttar Pradesh. 3rd–4th century, Kushan-Gupta transition. Sandstone. Height 22.86 cm. V&A: IM.75–1927

personifications of these attributes. The earliest expression of this can be seen in the rock-cut relief at Udayagiri, Cave 6, near Vidisa (Besnagar), Madhya Pradesh, dated to 401, from the reign of the early Gupta ruler Candragupta II (pl.165).

These early Vaiṣṇava images of Vasudeva-Kṛṣṇa/Viṣṇu embody the dominant cult image of the Kushan era, that of god as the great hero (Mahāvīra). He is always represented standing erect, and is crowned and bejewelled in a kingly fashion, very much the mortal hero elevated to deity (pl.166). His principal attributes, the discus, the club and the conch, are all associated with combat and underscore his martial status as a divine warrior-ruler. As a supra-normal divinity, Viṣṇu has the capacity to offer his devotees both protection and boons. This is given expression in his Vaikuṇṭha aspect, where the *avatāras* are displayed (pl.168). Viṣṇu thus came to be understood as an inclusive god, absorbing all forms of god, in particularly his *avatāras*. The sculptural record again makes this clear: the theriomorphic Varāha bears within his body the entire universe, all his forms, all sages and all gods. This is the Vaiṣṇava equivalent of the all-creating omnipotent Śiva.

However, as a divinity clearly distinct from Vasudeva, Viṣṇu only emerges in the late Kushan period. He is elevated by the Gupta royal household to state tutelary deity status, and *Garuḍa*, his *vāhana* (vehicle), becomes the insignia of their reign, appearing on temples, pillars (*stambhas*), standards (*dhvaja*) and coins.[18] Viṣṇu remains closely related to royalty, his most famous *avatāra* being Rāma, the hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic. Rāma embodies the model of perfect kingship, and as Viṣṇu is married to the earth, so the king reigns over the earth, as Visnu's regent.

As cogently argued by Doris Srinivasan, Viṣṇu may be seen to slowly emerge from the synthesis of three strands of theological activity. Firstly, it is the Vedic solar deity Adiya Viṣṇu who provides the clearest direct line of descent (and gave his name to the sect), and who incorporates the concept of divine appearances or *avatāras*, so central to Hindu Vaiṣṇavism. The *avatāras* all have their origins in the Vedas and Purāṇic myths. Secondly, the cult of Vasudeva, who has his origins in the great-hero (*vīra*) concept, was the divine warrior-ruler progressively identified with Kṛṣṇa, and with a theistic cult based on worship. Thirdly, the notion of a cosmic god whose origins are integral to the creation (and re-creation) of the universe is central to the prevailing cosmogony; hence Viṣṇu Nārāyaṇa and the primeval waters/cosmic ocean myths. The *Mahā-Nārāyaṇa Upanishad*, attributed to around the third century BCE, names Nārāyaṇa as the Absolute, the Supreme Lord of the Universe, *Puruṣa*, etcetera, although his mythological origins remain obscure.[19] He is considered a tree, fixed in heaven, no doubt the origin of the cosmic pillar or *stambha*. It is no coincidence that Viṣṇu is always represented, in his supreme form,

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▶ Viṣṇu-caturmūrti. A rare representation, which originated in the Gupta period, of Viṣṇu in four-fold representation, addorsed to a central pillar. Viṣṇu appears three times in his supreme form as Para-Vāsudeva, and once in his man-lion manifestation, Narasiṁha. Precedents for such composite images exist in both the Jain and Buddhist *sarvotabhadra* or *caturmukha* icons and shrines, and the Śaiva *liṅga* addorsed with the four faces of Śiva on the shaft. It is probably the latter which provided the model for this Vaisnava example. Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. *c.*10th century, Licchavi period. V&A: IS.30–1987

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▼ Viṣṇu Vaikuṇṭha, in which Viṣṇu manifests his man-lion form (Narasiṁha) and his boar form (Varāha) as supplementary heads. Unusually for Viṣṇu, the body is flexed, not strictly vertical, and he wears a dagger, a royal accoutrement. The long garland (*mālācakha*) falling to below the knees is still present, as first seen at 5th-century Udayagiri. Kashmir. 9th century, Karkota period. Black basalt. Height 43 cm. V&A: IS 542–1952

erect and perfectly vertical, 'pillar-like', explained at a mundane level as symbolizing his role as the Preserver of Stability in the Universe.

Out of these three strands emerged a syncretic deity first named in inscriptions of the early Gupta period as Viṣṇu.[20] Most importantly, what emerged was a religious system with a clear emphasis on devotion rather than pure ritual as its key activity. This emphasis was new, and sets Vaiṣṇavism apart from Vedic and Brahmanical ritual and sacrificial practices. Even Śaivism had not progressed as far along the devotional path, still being firmly rooted in Brahmanical ritual centred on the abstract *liṅga*. The devotional *bhakti* so familiar from medieval and modern Hinduism only emerges in the second half of the first millennium. With it we witness the emergence of a multiplicity of devotional images in complex forms.

Viṣṇu appears in a number of supreme forms, in acknowledgement of his central role in key creation myths. His foremost form is that as Maha-Viṣṇu, the archetypal pillar at the centre of universal order. He is depicted standing (*sthānaka-mūrti*) strictly vertical and symmetrical, with four arms and adorned with his familiar attributes, the conch, discus, club and bow, or more commonly *varadamudrā* gesturing the granting of a devotee's wishes. This is the form in which Viṣṇu is most widely worshipped, adorned and bejewelled. During special *pūjās* and festivals he is further embellished with detachable gold jewellery and yellow precious metal-thread fabric.

Two rare forms of Viṣṇu emerged in the Gupta period that underscore the hybridity of early cult images, and the incessant borrowing of powerful and efficacious forms by rival cults. Two instances can be cited. The first would appear to be the result of followers of Śiva absorbing Vaiṣṇava references into their imagery. This is the image of Harihara, a unique occurrence of two principal and rival deities, Viṣṇu (Hari) and Śiva (Hara), subsumed into a single form. Iconographically this is realized as an icon vertically divided, with their respective attributes disposed left and right. Śiva is assigned the right side and is the male element; Viṣṇu is assigned the left side and is seen as the female aspect. Other forms of hybridity do occur within the same cult, as in Śiva and Pārvatī co-joined as Ardhanārīśvara (pl.158). The second instance of cross-cult syncretism is to be found in the four images of Viṣṇu, facing the cardinal directions, emerging from a central pillar (pl.167). This concept, which may be termed Viṣṇu-caturmūrti (four-image Viṣṇu), appears to be the creation of the Gupta period theologians, but images remain rare.[21] This Vaiṣṇava image, with three representations of Viṣṇu in his supreme form and the fourth in his man-lion aspect, Narasimha, mimics in its conception and configuration the Saiva four-faced *liṅga*, the *caturmukhaliṅga*.

A central creation myth is the source of another great Viṣṇu icon, Anantāśāyana, Viṣṇu sleeping on Śeṣa (Ananta). This deals with Viṣṇu's sleep on the cosmic ocean, represented by the world-serpent Śeṣa. Viṣṇu lapses into this cosmic slumber at the end of each age (*yūpa*), only to be stirred when needed for re-creation of the next universe, in which he is aided by Brahmā, born from a lotus issuing from Viṣṇu's navel. This form of Viṣṇu gives expression to the most ancient of Indian creation myths, in which life comes forth from the primordial waters of the great flood. The cyclical concept of time, and life, so fundamental to the Hindu world view, is given its clearest expression in this sculptural form of Viṣṇu. The popularity of this subject is witnessed by several early renditions of it, most famously on the sixth-century Gupta temple at Deogarh, a sublime depiction of this creation myth, belonging to the first phase of freestanding temple building. It also appears in a contemporary terracotta relief panel at Bhitgaron (pl.34), and in rock-cut form a century or so later at Mamallapuram, in coastal Tamilnadu.

More complex forms occur, characterized by emanations and the depiction of

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▶ Viṣṇu. A majestic icon, in which Viṣṇu embodies the stability and permanence of the universe. The flaming discus, conch shell and club are emblems of his supreme authority, while the remaining hand gestures reassurance and protection (*abhayamudrā*), replacing the lotus held in earlier versions. This is probably a response to the challenges of Buddha images, where this gesture prevails. Excavated in Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. 10th century, early Cola period. Copper alloy. Height 72.5 cm. V&A: IM.128–1927. Bequest of Lord Curzon, 1927

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▼ Viṣṇu enthroned on a lotus seat, displaying in his four hands an early convention of attributes, notably of discus, conch shell, club and lotus. He wears a richly bejewelled cylindrical crown (*kirīṭa mukuṭa*) and ornaments, which establishes the decorative repertoire for the successive early Cola period. Kanchipuram district, Tamilnadu. 9th–10th century, Pallava period. Copper alloy. Height 22 cm. V&A: IM.13–1934

a multiplicity of body parts. At their simplest, these are intended to represent multiple identities or roles assumed by the deity. Emanations can represent separate cult identities embodied in one form. A creation of the Gupta period is Vaikuṇṭha, a standing Viṣṇu with three heads, the crowned human head of Viṣṇu, flanked by two *avatāras*, the man-lion Narasimha and the boar Varāha, perhaps the two oldest aspects of the cult of Viṣṇu, presumed to have been incorporated from ancient animal cults. This multi-headed or multi-faced form has direct parallels with the four-faced Śiva discussed above. In all probability, the Śaiva concept of emanations, first expressed in *liṅga* form, inspired the use of multiple imagery in Vaiṣṇava sculpture.

More elaborate again is the cosmic Viśvarūpa, a colossus form of Viṣṇu/Kṛṣṇa named in the Vedas and described in the *Bhagavata Gītā* as vast and frightening, manifest with multiple heads, arms and emanations. They are awesome icons, embodying in their complex iconography the concept of multiple emanations par excellence. This deity assumes its earliest known sculptural form as a Kushan-period pillar tiered with multiple male figures, the lowest form holding a discus (*cakra*) and the uppermost figure surmounted by a *Garuḍa*, the mythical sunbird.[22] The key iconographic components of Hindu Vaiṣṇavism are already present in this early anthropomorphic pillar (*stambha*) concept. The Viśvarūpa concept metamorphoses in the early Gupta period into a fully anthropomorphic form, but with the addition of four arms and emanations of subsidiary deities from the upper part of his body, such as Vasudeva, Balarāma/Sankarshana, Pradyumna and Aniruddha. The stele at Samalaji, Gujarat, conveys a sense of the power incarnate in such images. One of the finest representations of this subject is Changu Narayana, in tenth-century Licchavi-period Nepal.[23] This is a creation of the early medieval period that then disappears from the iconographic repertoire, perhaps because it represented an extreme and disturbing aspect that was not in keeping with the benign nature of Viṣṇu that was increasingly favoured by devotees.

Viṣṇu is conceived above all else as a solar god. Among the earliest recorded appearances, in Vedic sources, is of Viṣṇu striding the world in three steps (Trivikrama), a clear allusion to his role in bringing forth day and night. The flaming discus, a solar emblem, remains a key identifier of Viṣṇu throughout India (pls.169–70). It is therefore surprising to find another major cult deity whose imagery and cosmological meaning also attaches to the sun. The Vedic Sūrya is probably a borrowing of an Iranian solar god (*hvare* = to shine). There is extensive sculptural evidence into the medieval period of Sūrya enjoying his own cult, as witnessed by the impressive eleventh-century temple dedicated to him at Modhera, in northern Gujarat, and at the mid-thirteenth-century 'sun temple' at Konarak, where he is closely identified with Viṣṇu. Major cult images of Sūrya belonging to

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◀ Sūrya, the personification of the sun, holding flowering lotus in both hands. He is dressed in the tunic, crown, long sword and boots that are a legacy of the Iranian origins of this solar deity. The sun god travels through the sky on a chariot drawn by seven horses, seen on the base of the sculpture. At his feet is his charioteer Aruṇa, and his consort, and he is attended by the personifications of earth and air. Celestial archers drive off the hosts of the night and bring on light. Bihar. 10th century, Pala period. Black basalt. Height 142 cm. V&A: IM.109–1916

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▼ The ten appearances of Viṣṇu, *dasavatāra*. Painted wooden book cover from a manuscript edition of the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*, an early text recounting the 'descents' (*avatāras*) made by Viṣṇu through the ages in order to restore world order. Bishnupur, Bankura district, Bengal. Dated 1499. Paint on wood. 9 x 56.5 cm. V&A: IS.101–1955

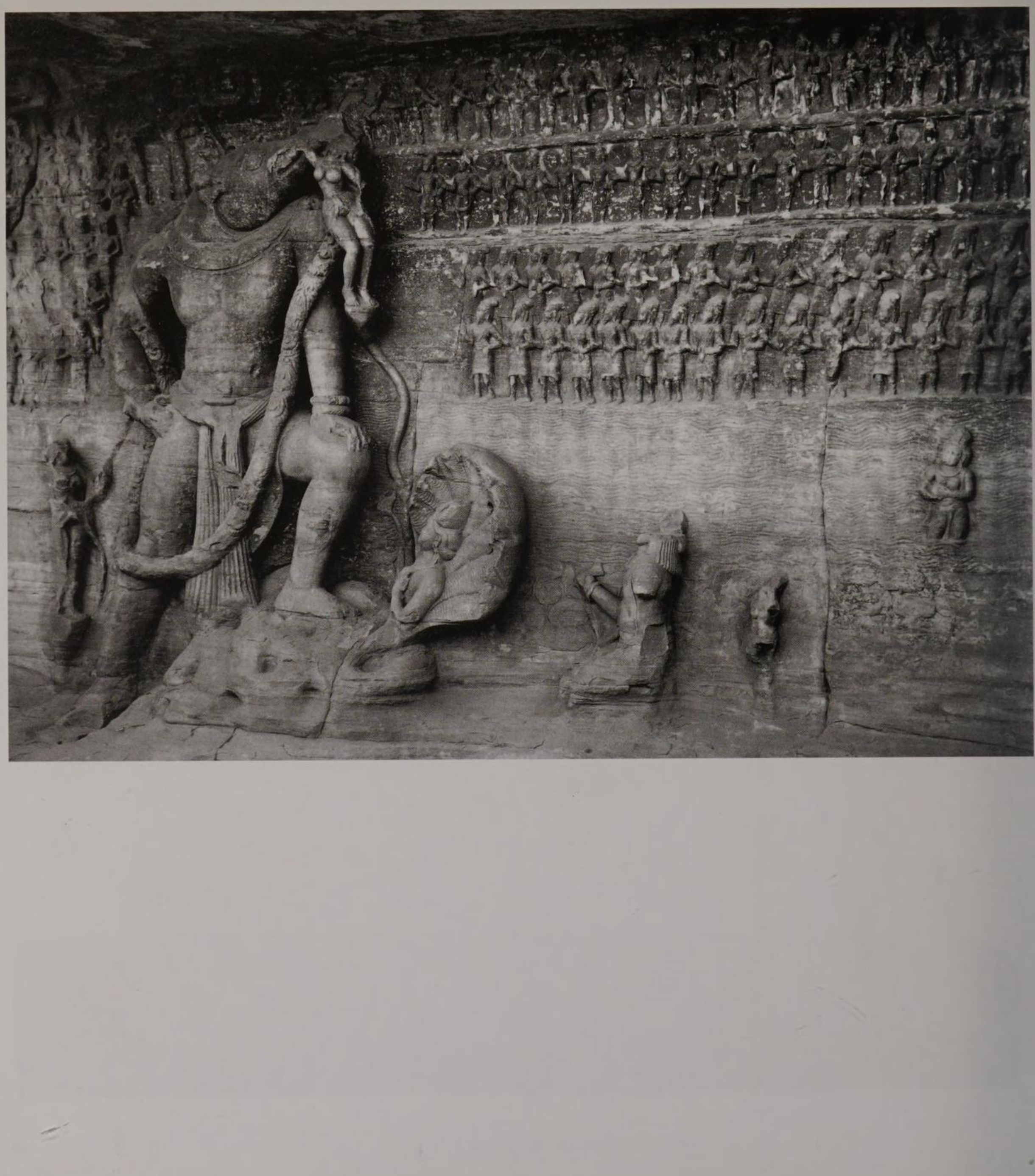
Pala period eastern India, and to the Deccan under the Hoysalas, make clear that his cult retained considerable status, even if relegated to the second league of gods by Viṣṇu (pl.171).

Dasavatāras

Viṣṇu is the supreme granter of grace in Hinduism, and according to Vaiṣṇava understanding he has made regular descents or appearances (*avatāras*) on earth at times of peril to save the world from destruction by demonic forces, and to restore order and stability to the universe.[24] In the *Bhagavata Gītā* (IV, 7–8), Viṣṇu declares that he will appear, 'for the protection of the good, for the destruction of evil-doers, for the sake of firmly establishing righteousness. For this purpose I am born from age to age.' The *avatāra* concept is expressed in the Vedas but is further developed and elaborated in the Purānas and given mythological form in the Epics. It is perhaps significant that the first four Viṣṇu-*avatāras* are in animal form, suggesting the adaptation or absorption of nature-cult deities into the Brahmanical mainstream. The first three are of great antiquity, possibly having their origins in pre-Vedic cosmogonies; the remainder deal with Viṣṇu as hero, and belong to the Vasudeva-Kṛṣṇa *vira*-cult tradition which contributed so much to the evolution of mature Vaiṣṇavism.

The most widely accepted canonical list of Viṣṇu appearances is ten, the *dasavatāras*, although Viṣṇu is credited with up to sixty-four. The *dasavatāras* were only formally 'canonized' in the twelfth-century writings of Jayadeva in his *Gītā Govinda*. These ten forms of Viṣṇu, with minor variations, are regularly depicted in Vaiṣṇava temple arts (pl.172):

- Matysa, the fish *avatāra*, associated with a great flood myth and seen as Viṣṇu's first divine intervention, during which he saved the Vedas from destruction.
- Kurma, the tortoise *avatāra*, whose mission was to retrieve divine treasures lost in the flood, most importantly the divine nectar (*amṛita*). This mighty task involved the active cooperation of both the gods and demons, who together used a mountain to 'churn the ocean', made possible by Viṣṇu's tortoise form providing the necessary bedrock for their task.
- Varāha, the boar *avatāra*, came to earth expressly to rescue the earth (personified as a goddess) from the demon Hiranyākśa, who had forced her to the depths of the cosmic ocean. Varāha raised her on his tusk, seen at Udayagiri, Cave 5, in the monumental rock-cut relief dated to 400–1 (pl.165). The massive boar cradling the diminutive earth goddess is one of the most tender images in Indian art.
- Narasimha, the man-lion *avatāra*, in which Viṣṇu descended in order to destroy the demon king Hiranyakaśipu, protected by a boon from Brahmā, which Viṣṇu outwitted by clever semantics. This *avatāra* confirms Viṣṇu's role as fearsome



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◀ Varāha, the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu, having rescued the earth goddess Prithhivī from the depths of the ocean where she had been incarcerated, witnessed by the assembled ranks of the sages. Udayagiri, Cave 5, Madhya Pradesh. Early 5th century, Gupta period. American Institute of Indian Studies

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▼ Varāha, the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu. The world saviour ascending from the floor of the cosmic ocean, having rescued the earth goddess Prithhivī; she is seen on his raised arm, her hands raised in thanksgiving (*añjalī*). This creation myth, perhaps rooted in a Vedic memory of a great flood, was preserved in this *avatāra* of Viṣṇu. Fathabad, Hissar District, Haryana. 12th century. Shale. Height 38 cm. V&A: IM.307–1921

protector of his devotees, and proved immensely popular with early medieval period kings, who identified closely with his qualities of bravery, strength and moral righteousness. Rulers from the Gupta, Vakataka, Pallava and Ganga ruling households all assumed reign names that linked them to Narasimha.

● Vāmana, the Brahman dwarf *avatāra*, sent to restore order threatened by the benign King Bali, who was granted jurisdiction over all the earth and heavens by Brahmā, so threatening the other gods. Viṣṇu appeared as a deformed Brahman, and was granted his wish for as much land as he could cover in three steps. Viṣṇu then manifested himself as an immense being and encircled the earth and sky, whereupon he is known as Trivikrama (taker of three steps/conqueror of the three worlds), most probably a metaphor for the sun, an allusion to Viṣṇu's solar origins. The myth of the dwarf spanning the three worlds (or the universe) in three strides first appears in the Vedas and is already attributed to Viṣṇu, then a minor deity.

● Paraśurāsma, the axe-bearing Viṣṇu, who descended to earth in the age (*yuga*) that immediately preceded the present *Kālī Yuga*, to protect the priestly Brahman caste from the oppressive nobility and warrior caste (Kshatriyas); rarely represented in temple arts.

● Rāmachandra, the Rāma *avatāra,* as described in the *Rāmāyana* ('Adventures of Rāma') in the early centuries BCE, recounting his numerous heroic deeds and acts of compassion, and elaborated in episodes of the *Mahābharata* (pl.175). He is accompanied in many of his exploits by his loyal supporter, the monkey warrior Hanumān (pl.177).

● Kṛṣṇa *avatāra* is surrounded by legends rich in romantic adventures, recounted in the *Bhagavata Purāṇa* and the *Mahābharata*, India's longest epic, which recounts the trials of feuding and warfare between two great families, the Pandavas and the Kauravas. Loving devotees venerate Kṛṣṇa at each stage of his life, from infancy, youth and manhood, during which he indulged in love sports with young women, suppressed rival cults (pl.176) and seduced and married Rādhā.

● Buddha *avatāra*. The absorption of the Buddha into the Vaiṣṇava system is not accepted by all followers of Viṣṇu (nor indeed by Buddhists). Nonetheless, it was a way of dealing with a rival faith, rationalizing and neutralizing the authority of the Buddha by assigning him a place in the Vaiṣṇava vision of universal order. It was not uncommon for Pala-period Buddha images to be installed in Hindu shrines in the later medieval period to be worshipped as Viṣṇu. At the Jagannātha temple in Puri, the Buddha-*avatāra* has a dedicated shrine (pl.95).

● Kalkin *avatāra*, who will appear, messianic-like, at the close of this current age, the *Kalī Yuga*, riding a white horse to exercise judgment; in sculptural iconography Kalkin is often represented as a horse-headed human and can thereby be confused

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▼ Rāma, the seventh appearance of Viṣṇu. Rāma, the hero of the *Rāmāyana* epic, embodies the noblest values of selflessness, loyalty and moral virtue. Rāma holds his longbow with his raised hand, and draws the string with the other. Reportedly from Ramnad Zamindari, Madurai, Tamilnadu. 17th century, Nayak period. Brass alloy. Height 77 cm. V&A: IM.71–1927

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▼ Kṛṣṇa suppressing the *nāga* Kālīya. One of the many miraculous deeds of the youthful Kṛṣṇa, who defeated a *nāga* that was threatening to poison the river Yamunā. Tamilnadu. 18th century, Nayak period. Copper alloy. Height 66 cm. V&A: IS.204–1959

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▼ Hanumān, the monkey warrior. Hanumān's role in the *Rāmāyana* epic as Rāma's staunch ally established his popularity in Hinduism. He is usually worshipped as part of a Rāma ensemble, along with Balarāma and Sītā. Reportedly excavated at Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. 12th century, Cola period. Copper alloy. Height 41 cm. V&A: IM.135–1927. Bequest of Lord Curzon, 1927

with Hayagriva, a horse deity who is sometimes seen as a minor *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, created to protect the scriptures.

Other appearances of Viṣṇu are recognized, such as Jagannātha (Lord of the World) an emanation of Kṛṣṇa, worshipped at the Jagannātha temple in Puri, Orissa. Jagannātha is worshipped as part of a triad, alongside his half-brother Balarāma and his sister (and consort) Subhadrā. This cult had a wide following in the later medieval period in the region extending from Orissa and Bengal to the royal households of Nepal, as witnessed by a cloth painting (*pata*) recording a royal *pūjā* honouring Jagannātha conducted at Bhaktapur in the Kathmandu Valley in 1670 (pl.95).[25]

The goddess

The third great presence to emerge on the religious landscape of the subcontinent was that of the goddess. Devī exists in a multitude of forms from the outset in the development of Indian religious imagery. By the beginning of the post-Vedic period, she has been closely identified as the cosmic energy (*śakti*) of Śiva, and as the supreme goddess who absorbs and reflects the energy of all other goddesses. No doubt the innumerable mother-goddess (fertility) and nature-goddess (*yakśi*) cults that the early terracotta sculpture records affirm were absorbed into this Brahmanical vision. Many of the terracotta votives display, projecting from the headdress, an assortment of 'weapons', the meaning of which is unclear. It has been suggested that they may serve some talismanic or magical function associated with the prevention of disease.[26] Similar displays appear at early Buddhist sites, such as Bedsa and Sanchi *Stūpa No.1*. Although it is difficult to demonstrate the precise relationship, this feature does suggest a continuity of ideas from these early goddesses of unknown function to the warrior-goddess Durgā in her role as agent of the assembly of senior gods. At the very least they form part of the inherited visual imagery onto which later iconographers could have grafted the Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī myth.

The goddess has a dual existence, to be worshipped in her own right as an independent deity and as an adjunct to a central male deity, where she is his *śakti*, the essential female energy that serves as the personification of a god's energy. These dual roles reflect the overlapping of Vedic and Tantric concepts. In the Vedas female divinities were understood as independent powers. This continued in later Hinduism, where Devī, the goddess in her many forms, was widely worshipped, often in temples and shrines expressly dedicated to her. The complexity of the goddess is best witnessed in the range of forms of Devī associated with Śiva: Pārvatī, the sweet and loving consort, Durgā the warrior-queen goddess and Kālī, the terrific aspect of Śiva's *śakti*. The goddess Śrī, popularly known as Viṣṇu's consort, Lakṣmī, and as a dispenser of wealth and prosperity, also had her origins in the Vedic period. Lakṣmī

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▲ Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī. A four-armed form of the goddess slaying the buffalo demon Mahiṣā with a *triśūla*, who she tramples beneath her foot while lifting the beast by its tail. This posture was an invention of Kushan-period sculptors of the 2nd century, and persisted through the Gupta and Licchavi periods. 7th century, Post-Gupta period. Terracotta. Height 17.5 cm. V&A: IS.71–1986. Given by Mary and Douglas Barrett

is worshipped from the Kushan period as an independent deity in her popular Gaja-Lakṣmī form, seated on a lotus and being lustrated by two elephants (pl.181).

Ultimately, the Supreme Goddess, Mahadevī, was seen to embody the energies (heat = *mahāteja*) of Śiva, Viṣṇu and Brahmā, whereupon she is known as Bhagavatī. Her power was openly acknowledged by them in the myth of the presiding male divinities who, unable to defeat in battle the demon Mahiṣa, requested the intervention of the goddess Durgā to fight on their behalf. They created her from their own body parts and armed her with their supernatural weapons. Durgā, blazing with the light-heat of all the gods, assumed a multi-armed form in order to brandish all these powers and, riding a lion, proceeded to slay the demon who had assumed the guise of a buffalo. Durgā beheaded the buffalo, and the demon Mahiṣa finally revealed himself in human form, whereupon she slew him with Śiva's *triśūla* (trident). This anthropomorphic appearance occurs for the first time only in the fifth-century Gupta period sculptural versions, as seen for example at Bhumara and Udayagiri, in Madhya Pradesh (pl.165).

This subject – although not this moment in the narrative scene – produced one of the greatest dramatic statements in early Indian art, the rock-cut relief panel in the cave of Mahiṣāsuramardinī at Mamallapuram. Here Durgā, flanked by her army, rides her lion fearlessly at the mighty bull-headed Mahiṣa, who recoils in surprise at this assault. This masterpiece makes clear, more than any contemporary text, that the goddess was supremely powerful in Brahmanical Hinduism, mightier in fact than the male gods who in this myth acknowledge her as their source of divine energy (*śakti*), a position she retains to this day.[27] In the Kushan and Gupta periods, Durgā appears to have been essentially a Vaiṣṇava goddess, and it is in the post-Gupta period that she is increasingly identified with Śiva as his *śakti*. The sixth-century Durgā temple at Aihole, and the *Devī Mahatmya* text, currently assigned to the eighth century, reflect this realignment.

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▶ Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī, revealed at the moment when the buffalo demon Mahiṣā metamorphoses to reveal himself in human form. Kathmandu Valley, Nepal. 9th–10th century, Licchavi period. Copper alloy repoussé with traces of gilding. Height 4.5 cm. V&A: IS.40–1988

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▶ Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī. The goddess in an eight-armed form, brandishing the weapons lent to her by the male gods, despatching the demon Mahiṣā. Hassan district, Karnataka. Mid-13th century, Hoysala period. Limestone. Height 143 cm. V&A: IS.77–1965

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▼ Gaja-Lakṣmī seal. The Hindu goddess of good fortune and prosperity stands on an open lotus above stylized waves. Two long-stemmed lotuses rise from the waters, each supporting an elephant pouring sacred water over the goddess from pitchers. The lustration scene is flanked by rocky projections in the conventional rendering seen in contemporary paintings, such as those at Ajanta. Below is an engraved inscription in Brahmi script of the 6th or 7th century stating that this is the seal of the Office of the District of the Warden of the Frontier of Sri-vadra. Found during a canal excavation near the Ganges between Hardwar and Kankhale, Uttar Pradesh. Cast and engraved copper alloy. 7.3 cm. V&A: IM.496–1924. Given by the Royal Asiatic Society

Sculptural images of the Mahiṣāsuramardini, the goddess slaying the buffalo, are known from the Kushan period, and the finds are concentrated at Mathura. Unusually, these representations in art are not accompanied by any known textual descriptions, Vedic or otherwise, upon which these images could be expected to be based. Durgā's name in this form only appears in later interpolations of the *Mahābharata*, and the first full account of her battle with Mahiṣa and his army is in the Purāṇic myth in the *Devī Mahatmya*.[28] The goddess on a lion first appears in the Kushan era and may be an adaptation of the Mesopotamian goddess Nana merged with myths associating the war god Skanda with the buffalo demon Mahiṣa. Whatever the precise lineage, the result was a goddess of immense powers beyond those of the individual male gods. The Kushan and early Gupta-period depictions of Durgā slaying Mahiṣa show the goddess wrestling the buffalo demon, and wielding Śiva's trident (*triśūla*) and sword (*mahasi*) to administer the mortal blows (pl.178).

An intermediate stage in the final development of this iconographic form is seen in the Udayagiri cave relief, Madhya Pradesh, dated 401 CE, where the goddess holds the buffalo's neck to the ground with one foot while lifting the beast upwards by his hind legs, and administering the coup de grace with the *triśūla* (pl.165). Above her head she holds a wreath, apparently crowning herself in victory, echoing west Asian warrior-goddess prototypes. As the supreme warrior-goddess, rulers and warriors invoked Durgā through prayers and offerings before they went into battle throughout Indian history. Her developed form is seen in the later medieval temple art of most regions of India, each expressed in its unique regional style. Compare two Durgās, one from Nepal (pl.179), the other from the Deccan (pl.180). The former displays attenuated stylized forms and the restrained use of ornamentation, while the latter is full bodied and richly elaborated in all its detail. They could not be more different stylistically, yet they share in a common vision of the goddess, each conveying a powerful and wholly convincing sense of her awesome greatness.

Durgā is also venerated as the goddess of magical knowledge (*vidyādhara*), and has a special place in the pantheon of gods as the composer of mystic syllables (*bīja*) and magical formulas (*dhārāṇīs* and *mantras*). The seed syllable can be spoken, or visualized as a letter and written as part of a *yantra* (magical diagram). The recitation of *bīja mantra* (thought-form), spoken or silent, is one path to visualizing a deity and a path to spiritual liberation in all forms of Tantrism, Hindu or Buddhist.

While Durgā as Mahiṣāsuramardinī was the most powerful form of the goddess of first-millennium Brahmanical culture, she was not alone. Devī was worshipped in a multitude of forms: she is the tender mother Ambikā (pls.182–3); the sweet consort to Śiva, Śhakti Devī; the benevolent granter of boons and goddess of wealth, Lakṣmī (Śri) (pl.181), and the goddess of learning, Sarasvatī. She can be Tārā, a source of light, and she is also Kālī, whose hunger is insatiable, the wrathful Kālī (pls.150, 152), the

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▶ Ambikā. The Jain goddess whose names means 'mother' is revered by both Jains and Hindus, for whom she is a benign aspect of Durgā . Ambikā is the *yakśi* to the 22nd Jain saviour, Neminātha, whose haloed image presides over her. She supports an infant on her lap with one hand, while holding a stem of mango with the other, emblematic of her fecundity. Beneath her throne is a lion, her *vāhana*, flanked by two kneeling donors. Her smiling expression radiates the maternal compassion for which Ambikā is much loved. Orissa. Late 12th century, Eastern Ganga period. Steatite. Height 51.5 cm. V&A: IS.61–1963

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▼ Pūrṇesvari. Both Hindus and Buddhists worship this mother goddess. An indication of the Buddhist affiliation is given in the donor inscription, which offers merit to the *siddhas* (community of tantric masters) and *śramaṇas* (ascetic monks), as well as to the relatives of the donor, named as 'Utakva'. The inscription names the goddess, the place of installation – the 'illustrious (city of) Campa' – and dates it to the 35th reign year of a king called Palapala, titled as 'Lord of Gauda' (Gaudesvara). Found in 1877 when excavating a tank at Jaynagar, Monghyr District, Bihar. Late 12th century, Pala period. Black shale. Height 81.3 cm. V&A: IS.71–1880

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▶ Rock-cut shrine to the *Saptamātṛkās*, the 'Seven Mothers', presided over by the three 'mother-superiors', Durgā (on her lion), Kausiki (an emanation of Pārvatī) and Kala Bhairava (trampling a corpse). Kailaśhanatha temple, Cave 16, Ellora, Maharastra. Mid-6th century, Early Western Chalukya period. V&A SSEA Archive

supreme power of destruction (hence Mahākālī, the Great-Kālī), and the dreaded (and dreadful) Cāmuṇḍā.

The creation myth of Cāmuṇḍā (pl.185) illustrates so vividly the interdependence of the goddess's many forms that it is worthy of quotation from the *Devī Mahātmya* section of the *Mārkaṇḍeya*. The benign beauty Ambikā, summoned to marry the demon king Sumbha, refused and was set upon by his demon warriors Chanda and Munda. Incensed at this, Ambikā uttered her anger, and 'from her forehead, rugged with frowns, suddenly sprang forth a goddess, black and scowling, of terrible countenance, with drawn sword and noose, bearing a many-coloured skull-topped staff (*khatvanga*), decorated with a garland of skulls, clad in a tiger's skin, grim with emaciation, exceedingly wide of mouth, lolling out her tongue, terribly, having deep sunken reddish eyes, and filling the sky with her roars.' She killed Chanda and Munda, and so was named Cāmuṇḍā, in recognition of her service.[29] Cāmuṇḍā is closely associated with Tantrism, and can be worshipped singly, or as one of the seven mothers (*Saptamātṛkās*), where she is linked to Śiva's wrathful Bhairava form, as seen at Ellora (pl.184).

Devī has innumerable other forms, many of a very localized nature and known only to the communities who worship her in a form of their own devising.[30] All the forms of Devī embody two principles, that of *maya*, the female element from which the creative potential arises, and that of *śakti*, female energy. While many of the principal goddesses are closely linked to male divinities, and worshipped in subsidiary shrines in the male god's temple complex, this was never true for all of them. Autonomous goddess temples and shrines existed from early in the history of temple building in India. Again, it is the sculptural record that demonstrates the early importance of female deity cults, as witnessed by relief medallion depictions of the goddess Gaja-Lakṣmī on the enclosure railings (*vedikās*) of Bharhut, Bodhgaya and Sanchi (*Stūpa* Nos.1 and 2) in the first century BCE and first century CE. The goddess is seated on a lotus issuing from a 'vase of plenty' (*pūrṇakalaśa*) being lustrated by a pair of gleeful elephants, also lotus borne, on a railing pillar at the Buddhist *stūpa* site of Bharhut, dated to the second century BCE (pl.25). An inscribed monumental cult image of a seated Sarasvatī found at Mathura is secure evidence of the importance that this goddess cult had assumed by the second century CE (pl.43).

The most celebrated goddess temple is the Ambikā-Mātā, at Jagat, Rajasthan, dated *c.*960. It originally consisted of three shrines, dedicated to Lakṣmī, Kālī and Sarasvatī respectively, reflecting the same devotional emphasis as the *Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇa* that celebrates these same three goddesses through their mythical exploits. Specific architectural forms were devised for ensembles of goddesses. Perhaps the most remarkable is the concept of the circular open-air *yoginī* temple.[31] In this space are arranged auspicious numbers of images – eight or multiples of eight. The ninth-century *yoginī* shrine at Hirapur, near Bhuvanesvara, Orissa, has sixty-four icons serially arranged in niches on the interior wall of the enclosure wall of the circular courtyard, as does another circular shrine at Coimbatore, in south India. The shrine near the Kaṇḍarīya Mahādeo temple at Khajuraho again had sixty-four *yoginīs*, there set in a rectangular shrine, each icon installed in her own shrine house. Each deity is worshipped as a manifestation of Durgā (pls.186–88).

The cult of *yoginīs* – minor goddesses with powerful and malevolent magical powers – was associated early in its appearance with esoteric Tantric rites. As servants of Durgā, they aid her in inflicting destruction and exacting retribution. While wrathful and fearsome to their enemies, properly pacified they show kindness to their devotees. Their names link them to human emotions, from which they will free devotees to more clearly worship the Mahādevī, Great Goddess. They are believed to combine the forces of shamanic magic and yoga, and are to be

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▶ **Cāmuṇḍā, one of the most fearsome emanations of the goddess, epitomizes all that is terrifying and horrific in the Hindu vision. She is represented as an emaciated old woman, her haggard body typically garlanded with skulls, snakes and scorpions. Terracotta. Height 35.5 cm. V&A: IS.68–1986**

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[Previous page] *Yoginī* temple, in which the sixty-four goddesses are installed in niches within a circular enclosure wall. This large shrine, sited overlooking the Narmada river, was intended for royal use. Bheraghat, near Jalalpur, Madhya Pradesh. Late 10th century. Photograph by Henry Hinton, *c.*1860s. V&A SSEA Archive

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▼ The *yoginī* Varāhi, the female aspect of the boar avatar of Viṣṇu, Varāha. The principal *yoginī* goddesses assumed the form and name of a major male god as part of the process of absorbing these powerful forces into the Brahmanical system. From an unidentified *yoginī* shrine, Uttar Pradesh. 8th–9th century, Pratihara period. Pink sandstone. Height 24 cm. V&A: IS.144–1999

approached with extreme caution. Their evil natures have constantly to be kept in check, and they are therefore always attended (guarded in fact) by Vīrabhadra (a lesser emanation of Śiva) and Gaṇeśa.

The *yoginīs* may at some point in the past have incorporated the cult of the *Saptamātṛkās*, the 'seven mothers', but the precise nature of this early relationship is now obscure. It may be that they share a common ancestry in non-Vedic animistic *yakśi* cults, later absorbed into the Hindu system. The existence of these goddesses was acknowledged in the Vedic period, but there they remained nameless. Only in the Brahmanical period were they systematically allied to high-tradition male deities, and declared their allegiance by displaying the male god's attributes and assuming female forms of their names, hence Brahmānī (Brahmā), Māheśvarī (Śiva), Kaumārī (Kumāra = Skanda), Vaiṣṇavī/Lakṣmī (Viṣṇu), Vārāhi (Varāha) (pl.187), Indranī (Indra) and Cāmuṇḍā (sometimes replaced by Narasimhī or Narasimha). The seven mothers are assumed to represent a variety of personality traits, from the benign to the horrific, and in later popular perception are seen as essentially malevolent bearers of sickness and disease. They make one of their first appearances in the mid-sixth century flanking Śiva Naṭarāja in the Rāvana-Phadi Cave at Aihole. Their presence in a relief sculpture at the early-eighth-century Kailaśanatha temple at Kanchipuram indicates their acceptance into mainstream orthodoxy in Pallava, south India. However, because of their propensity to bring harm they were over time excluded from the Brahmanical temple and marginalized. They were increasingly isolated from the populace, their shrines usually being located outside the town boundaries. Today they are widely worshipped as folk deities by female devotees, and once placated, will be benevolent to their devotees and protect their villages.

The *Saptamātṛkās* are all absorbed into the mother goddess par excellence, Durgā, Śiva's terrifying *śakti*, who marshals all their energies when necessary.

Other female deities, such as Jyeṣṭha, the elder sister of Lakṣmī, are seen as the embodiment of inauspiciousness, the very personification of evil and poverty, and she is worshipped to prevent these misfortunes (pl.189).[30] She is not identified as one of the mother goddesses (*mātṛkās*), although through her links to Lakṣmī she is closely related. Her eight-armed form is described in the fifth-century *Viṣṇudharmottara*, and a tenth-century lexicon, the *Sendan Divakaram*, lists the eight Tamil names assigned to her, a clear indication of her widespread following.[31] Jyeṣṭhā is known in northern India from the fourth and fifth centuries, and is first recorded in the south at the eighth-century Pallava Kailashanatha temple at Kanchipuram – prominently sited on the north wall of the main shrine (pl.192); she is a regular presence at early Cola temples, often having her own subsidiary shrine. By the end

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▼ *Yoginī*. One of series of female malevolent attendants of Durgā who do her will. These goddesses, who can number up to sixty-four, are typically configured in a circular shrine open to the sky. Madhya Pradesh, perhaps Raipur region. 9th century, Pratihara period. Sandstone. Height 63.5 cm. V&A: IS.9–1969

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▼ Jyeṣṭhā, the goddess of ill-fortune. The most inauspicious of the goddesses, and often identified as the elder sister of Lakṣmī. Jyeṣṭhā holds a long-stemmed blue lotus (*nilotpala*) and is flanked by her crow-mounted standard (*dhvaja*), visible behind her left shoulder. Her two children attend her – her bull-headed son is seen carrying a club. In eastern India she is worshipped as Sitala, the goddess of smallpox. Tamilnadu, possibly the Pudukottai region. *c.*10th century, late Pallava–early Cola period. Granite. Height 86 cm. V&A: IS.11–1979

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◀ Yamunā, the personification of the river Yamunā (Jamna). She is represented riding on a tortoise (*kūrma*) and is attended by two handmaidens, one supporting her umbrella. To the left stands a bearded figure in 'northerner's dress', her father the sun god Sūrya. Together with Gaṅgā, these two river goddesses conventionally flank a temple doorway, cleansing those who enter from the mundane world to the palace of the gods. Madhya Pradesh. Late 9th–10th century, Pratihara period. Sandstone. Height 51.5 cm. V&A: IS.17–1986

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▼ Rock-cut shrine of the three river goddesses, Sarasvatī, Gaṅgā and Yamunā. Kailaśa temple, Ellora, Maharasthra. Mid-8th century, Early Western Calukya period. V&A SSEA Archive

of the Cola period, however, her cult had largely disappeared, as had the *Saptamātṛkā*.

The demise of these fearful cults coincided with the late appearance of the benign Devī, especially Pārvatī, alongside the mother-goddess tutelary deity, Amman (Mother), both of which came into vogue in southern India from the later Cola period. Although largely banished from the temple setting, the fearful goddess cults lived on in the south Indian countryside, their icons installed on simple platforms (*pīṭhas*) or in shrines typically sited in a grove of trees and always located outside the village limits. These are gods who transgress, who break the taboos – they are the eaters of flesh and drinkers of blood, and must be appeased with the periodic killing of goats, chickens, sheep and, in some rites, buffalo. They in turn act as guardians (*grāmadevatās*) of the village community, protecting it from disease and other malevolent forces. Some have links to Tantric forms of mainstream goddesses, notably Durgā, and are generally worshipped by lower caste communities. In some communities the buffalo sacrifice is associated with Durgā Mahiṣāsuramardinī.[32] Annual festivals (*jātrās*) are held in honour of the village goddesses, and special offerings are made in the event of the outbreak of diseases. Body piercing and trance-induced spirit possessions are normal parts of such rituals.

Nature personified

Some of the gods were anthropomorphic personifications of elements of nature. This extended even to include moments in the day – night and dawn were personified as the goddesses Rātri and Usas. Most natural elements were accommodated: the seas were represented in human form, carrying jewel vessels. Sacred rivers were among the earliest elements to be identified with deities. The Gaṅgā is named in the *Ṛgveda* as a river goddess (they speak of 'goddess waters') and over time assumed a role as the archetype of sacred rivers. Their greatness or sanctity is measured by reference to the Gaṅgā – hence the Kaveri, the great river of Tamilnadu in the heart of Cola territory, is also known locally as the Gaṅgā of the South.

By around the fifth century, the *Viṣṇudharmottara* is able to provide a codified iconographic description of these river goddesses: 'Rivers shall be represented in human forms with their *vāhanas*, their knees should be bent and their hands should

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▼ Jyeṣṭhā, the goddess of ill-fortune, flanked by her two children. This is the earliest datable image of the goddess, and her placement on the temple *vimāna* underscores her status in the Pallava period. Stone relief sculpture on the sanctuary exterior, Kailaśanatha temple, Kanchipuram. Early 8th century, Pallava period. Photograph École Francaise d'Extreme-Orient, Pondicherry.

hold full pitchers' (pl.190). The Gaṅgā, Yamunā and Sarasvatī, the greatest rivers of northern India, were personified early on as river deities, reflecting the sanctity of rivers spoken of in the epic *Mahābharata*. Rivers were revered as sacred pilgrimage places (*tīrthas*) conducive to worshipping ancestors and gods, a meeting point where sacred landscape and Hindu mythology merged. Each of the three rivers is represented in its personified form at the eighth-century rock-cut Kailaśa temple at Ellora, Maharastra, as a beautiful and elegant goddess (pl.191). Yamunā is standing on her tortoise and Sarasvatī on her lotus, and they flex their hips in a manner that is both gracious and suggestive of the swift flow of water, echoing the swirling lotus vines that enliven each goddess's niche; only Gaṅgā stands on her *makara* firm footed and centred, the mother of all rivers. The river goddesses embody the powers of purification – the flowing water washes away pollution, and the sins of a devotee, hence the desire of a devotee to bath in one of the blessed rivers, and better still, to die there. As the embodiment of purification and the exclusion of pollution, the river goddesses Gaṅgā and Yamunā became the standard iconic forms to be represented on temple door jambs in the medieval period, marking and protecting the threshold between the polluted, mundane world and the pure environment of god's sanctuary.[33]

Various legends of the river goddess Gaṅgā's descent to earth are provided, in Vedic and later Purāṇic and Epic sources. The most popular is that which associates the goddess with Śiva: having agreed to descend to relieve a parched earth, Gaṅgā is concerned that the impact of her flow will destroy the earth, and so Śiva agrees to first catch her in his matted ascetic's hair, before releasing her gently to earth. The early importance of this creation myth is confirmed by its depiction as one of the suite of monumental rock-cut reliefs at Elephanta, in the mid-sixth century. Śiva is depicted standing with Pārvatī, while Gaṅgā is received by Śiva into his matted hair, and is also received as Śiva's second wife, much to Pārvatī's irritation. Together with the three river personifications depicted at Ellora, we witness the paramount position that these nature myths had assumed in Purāṇic literature and art. This legend is also reflected in those Cola bronzes of Śiva Naṭarāja in which a diminutive mermaid, Gaṅgā, is represented in Śiva's flowing locks, which indeed sometimes resemble the stream of a great river (pl.139). In the *Skanda Puraṇa*, Śiva says:

> She, the Gaṅgā, is my supreme image, having the form of water, the very essence of Śiva's soul. ...
> For the protection of the world do I playfully uphold the Gaṅgā, who is mother of the world, the supreme Brahmān's very embodiment.[34]

One of the many names given to Śiva is Gaṅgādhara, Bearer of the Gaṅgā, in recognition of this cosmic role assumed by Śiva. Gaṅgā is in turn

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▶ Ayannār shrine. Village deities, near Kanchipuram, rural Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, 2003

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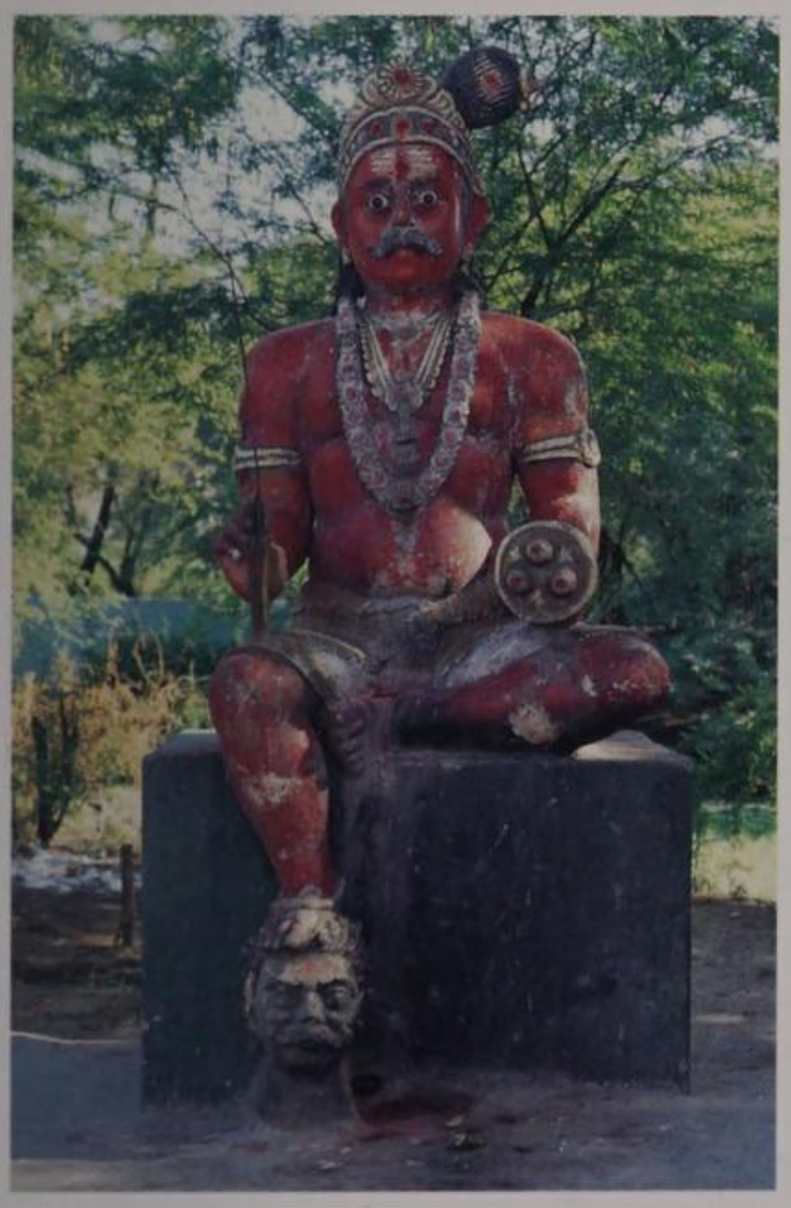
▼ Ayannār shrine, near Pudukottai, rural Tamilnadu. Photograph by the author, 1994

acknowledged as Śiva's ultimate *śakti*, his unmeasureable life energy.

It is an achievement of popular Hinduism, stimulated by the energetic evangelizing of the *bhakti* saints, that a deity can be simultaneously a pan-Indian universal deity and a much-loved local god, tied to local myth and topography. Other deities are more expressly regional in their origins, generated out of a localized set of legends. These may emerge from the adoption and absorption of animistic cult deities, including *yakśa* cults, and from the deification of local heroes (*vīra*), whose origins are linked to the community in which they are worshipped. Sometimes the popularity of these local cult deities becomes sufficiently widespread that they are acknowledged in the Sanskritic high tradition, and assigned a place in the hierarchy of worship. The south Indian village deity Ayannār, a powerful protector of villagers from the malevolent forces that stalk the countryside at night, is one such god. He continues to be widely worshipped in Tamilnadu at the village level, with open-air shrines amassed with brightly painted terracotta horses (pls.193–4); he is also represented in temple bronzes, where he has won a secure place of honour as one of the secondary deities (pl.195).



As we have seen, Indian gods may be classified by their nature, between those who are essentially benign and beneficent, and those who are malicious, dangerous and often outright destructive. Each personality trait will require a particular set of devotional responses to ensure that this god, and the forces for good or evil that it embodies, are properly appeased. Some deities have dual existences. This is particularly true of goddesses, who are often required to tread ambiguous territory. The mātṛkās (mother) goddesses need to be worshipped regularly to satisfy their 'hunger', lest they take away the newborn infants. The earliest recorded mother goddess is perhaps Hārītī, known from at least the Kushan period as the child thief and devourer of children, who only by being (ritually) fed reverts to her alter-ego role as a protector of children. Durgā is widely worshipped in the countryside, where she demands to be ritually fed.

In addition to the major cult deities described here, there was a vast array of minor gods, worshipped principally in rural villages. These 'lesser pantheons' were a significant substrata of Indian devotional life, representing an important alternative path to that offered by the large temple foundation under the priestly direction of high-caste Brahmans. Their cults had a strong cross-over with local hero (*vīra*) cults, as well as a daily concern with placating the powerful animistic spirits of the land. Cola-period temple inscriptions from the reign of Rajendra (r. 1012 – 44) refer to them disparagingly as 'the gods of the slums (*seris*)'.[35] While most were worshipped in

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◀ Ayannār, riding his elephant. Ayannār is unusual in having been venerated from an early period both as a protector of village life and having a place, albeit minor, in Brahmanical temple culture, where his processional image is a regular feature of temple icon ensembles used in periodic festivals. 12th century, Nolanda period. Copper alloy. Group height 38 cm. V&A: IM.15–1939 and IM.14–1938

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▼ Gaṇa, a godling attendant of Śiva, typically represented as an obese dwarf, often characterized as Śiva's mischievous helper. Probably Deo Patan, Nepal. *c.*8th century, Licchavi period. V&A: IS.145–1986. Given by Mary and Douglas Barrett

simple village shrines, some were elevated and endowed with a temple, known as a *srikoyl*. Inscriptions of the Cola monarch Rājarāja I (r.985–1016) name a number of goddesses honoured in this way. Describing shrines to forms of 'Pidāri' (Kālī), they recorded the goddess living 'on a river bank,' 'in a grove of *punnai* trees', 'surrounded by [clay] horses'.[36] Clearly these were spirit forces that could not be ignored by the keepers of the orthodox temples.

A vast assortment of lesser divinities exists in India. These are celestial worshippers and adorers of the divine, whose task is to uphold order in the universe. They include *yakśas*, *nāgas*, *gandharvas*, *apsarās* and *kinnaras*. They function as guardians (pl.147), such as the *yakśa* Kuvera who is protector of the underworld treasury, and as celestial entertainers, the *gandharvas* and *apsarās* providing heavenly music and dance for the god's enjoyment. Bird nymphs, *kinnara* and *kinnarī*, attend the gods in adoration. *Gaṇas*, dwarf-like goblins, are specifically seen as Śiva's highly mischievous little helpers (pl.196).

Many of the minor gods and godlings who populate village India and the surrounding countryside and forests have over time been subsumed into the 'high tradition' as 'guardians, outcasts and tricksters'.[37] This is a world populated by malevolent spirits, ghosts and other forces who violate the codes and boundaries of society by which humans (and other gods) live. Demons are converted into *bhaktas*, unlikely converts to devotionalism, through combat with a superior (Brahmanical) god, thus becoming demon-devotees and assuming a role as protective guardians. Others, whatever their origins, are recast as outcasts, such as Kattavarayan, a wayward minor son of Śiva. Few of these gods are pan-Indian; rather they have grown out of their own peculiar and specific landscapes, where they continue to be worshipped and placated alongside the orthodox pantheon of gods. These are the spirits of the earth and sky personified and pressed into the service of the gods. The Indian religious landscape is densely populated with such beings, and always has been.

Notes

Chapter 1

1 *Epigraphia Indica*, vol. XXII: 203–4; Hartel 1987: 574–5.
2 Bhandarkar, 1913: 3; see also Maxwell, 1997: 74. Note that the *Nidessa*, along with other early 'texts', was probably only recorded in written form from around the first century BCE; before that, it would have been transmitted orally.
3 Near the ancient capital of Vidisa (modern Bhilsa, Madhya Pradesh); Sircar, 1965: 88–9; for Vāsudeva, see Hartel, 1987.
4 Hartel, 1987: 574–5.
5 Bautze, 1995, for a survey of their distribution and a study of the role of these cult images as early iconographic models.
6 Singh, 2004.
7 Joshi, 1987–9: 16.
8 For early *yakśa* images, see Mitterwallner, 1989.
9 Shah, 1987: 37.
10 For an introduction to the monumental remains of Kushan Mathura, see Sharma, 1984; for a detailed report of the Sonkh excavations, see Hartel, 1993.
11 Government Museum, Mathura, H. 2.
12 Knox, 1992: cats. 73,75–7; see also Konczak, 2005.
13 Joshi, 1979; see also Hartel, 1987.
14 Raven, 1994.
15 Shah, 1987: 13.
16 Illustrated in DeCaroli, 2004: 29.
17 Kooij, 1993; for apsidal shrines, see also Ray, 2004.
18 Illustrated R.C.Sharma, 1984.
19 Ramannujan, 1973, in the *bhakti* poetry of Allam Prabhu.
20 Ramachandran, 1953.
21 Guy, 1991:358–9.
22 Ramanujan, 1993: xii.
23 *Ṛgveda*, X, 90, cited in Baumer, 1988, 25.
24 Government Museum, Mathura, No. Q.13.
25 Kreisel, 1986: 83, n. 248.
26 See Mallebrein, 1998, 1999.
27 The greatest expression of the *dharmacakra stambha* tradition was to be found outside India, in the Dvaravati kingdom of Central Thailand, see Brown, 1996.
28 Their dates are debated but are generally accepted as follows: the Jina Mahāvīra, known as Vardhamana, c.599–527 BCE; the Buddha, known as Siddharta Gautama, c.566–486 BCE. See Bechert and Gombrich, 1984: 41.
29 Kresiel, 1986: 83.
30 The Kushan Kanishka era most probably begins 127 CE, see Falk, 2001.
31 National Museum, New Delhi.
32 The *yakśa* theory has recently been challenged in regard to Buddhist imagery, Tanabe, 2004.
33 Schmid, 2002:145–6.
34 Harle and Topsfield, 1987:no.7; also Bautze 1995.

Chapter 2

1 Kramrisch, 1928, Book III, verse 1.8.
2 For an introduction to the historiography of *śāstra*, see Pollack, 1989.
3 Misra, 1989.
4 Thaper, 1974. See also Coomaraswamy, 1909.
5 Kramrisch, 1983: 59–66.
6 Sharma, 1984: 131.
7 Mitterwallner, 1989.
8 Schopen, 1997: 30–33, and 2004: 382–94.
9 Chandra, 1970: 14.
10 Goswamy and Dahmen-Dallapiccola, 1976 and Mukerji, 2001 respectively.
11 Kramrisch, 1928.
12 For cogent discussions of the complexities surrounding this statement, in reference to sculpture, see Gail, 1989; and for architecture, Dagens, 1989.
13 *Viṣṇudharmottara*, III.
14 Kalidasa, cited in Chandra, 1970, p. 14.
15 *Viṣṇudharmottara*, III, 43, in Mukerji, 2001: 253.
16 *Viṣṇudharmottara*, III, 2.1, in Mukerji, 2001: ix.
17 J. Mosteller, 1988: 24–5.
18 *Viṣṇudharmottara*, III, 2.4, in Mukerji, 2001: ix.
19 Vatsyayan, 1983: 104.
20 N. Ramachandran, 1969. The principal commentary on the *Nātyaśāstra* was written by Abhinavagupta in the eleventh century.
21 *Viṣṇudharmottara*, III, 1.8, in Mukerji, 2001.
22 *Svacchanda Tantra*, iv, 306.
23 *Viṣṇu Upanishad*, II, 6–7, in Vatsyayan,1988: 114.
24 Sharma, 1984.
25 Bautze-Picron, 1996.
26 Bose, 1929: 54.
27 Hakkura Pheru, cited from a Gujarati translation by Cort, 2006.
28 Barnett, 1915: 337–9.
29 Tripathi, 1978.
30 Commaraswamy, 1928–1931.
31 *Tāla* has parallel systems of measuring time, and imposing order, in music and dance; see Vatsyayan, 1983: 18–19.
32 Staal in Baumer, 1992: 358.
33 Kern, 1865, Vatsyayan, 1983: 105.
34 *Ajitagama*, ch. 36, in Baumer, 1992: 381–3.
35 Coomaraswamy, 1977: 244.
36 *Viṣṇudhamottara*, III, 1.8, in Mukerji, 2001.
37 Kramrisch, 1983: 53.
38 Brouwer, 1995: 199.
39 Brouwer, 1995: 105–6.
40 Brouwer, 1995: 86, 95.
41 Brouwer, 1995: 87.
42 These issues are skillfully addressed by Cort, 2006.
43 Cort, 2006.
44 Swearer, 1995:50–58.
45 Banerjea, 1956:565–8.
46 Svacchanda Tantra, iv, 306, in Baumer, 1988, 113.
47 Kramrisch, 1983:4.

Chapter 3

1 S. Kramrisch, 1946: 165.
2 Baumer, 1988.
3 Dagens, 1996.
4 The same system is applied to domestic architecture which follows the *vāstuśāstra* principles.*
5 L'Hernault, 2002.
6 Bhattacharyya, 1947: 213.
7 Basavanna, hymn no. 820, in Ramanujan, 1973: 88.
8 Kramrisch, 1983: 63–4.
9 Hulzsch, vol. I, 1890, inscription no. 24, pp. 12–14.
10 Bakker, 1992.
11 Bakker, 1992: 99.
12 Nath, 1987: 19.
13 Venkatarama, 1985: 148.
14 *Mayamata*, 19: 39–46, trans. Dagens, 1985.
15 M.A. Dhaky, cited in Hardy, 1995, 23 and 32, n. 16.
16 Srinivasan, 1990, 108.
17 Nandi is more correctly identified as Vrsabha/Vrsavāhana, see Tartakov, 2001.
18 Guy, 1990.
19 According to Tirupati temple's website, pilgrim numbers vary from 10,000 to 70,000 daily, and generate an annual income of 6 billion rupees.
20 Hultzsch, 1895, vol. II, parts 1–5, esp. part III.: 259–303. At the Tanjavur temple alone, 64 inscriptions belong to Rājarāja's reign.

Chapter 4

1 Neither Buddhists nor Jains strictly define their leaders as 'gods', but rather as spiritual role models whose example can be followed to achieve *mokṣa*. In terms of historical ritual practices, however, they were effectively treated as deified beings, and seen as such by the bulk of the lay devotees.
2 Appar, hymn no. IV.76, in Peterson, 1989: 212.
3 Cort, 2001.
4 Davis, 1991: 10.
5 Bakker, 2004.
6 Hultzsch, 1890: 24.
7 Filliozat, 1983.
8 Mahādevīyakka, hymn no. 88, in Ramanujan, 1973: 125.
9 The activities of *devadāsī* were prohibited under the Devadāsī Act of 26 November, 1947.
10 Eck, 1985: 3.
11 The *Teveram* consists of the devotional hymns of Campantar, Appar and Cuntarar; see Peterson, 1989, part two, sections II, for examples of their most evocative hymns.
12 Apte and Karnik, 1998:27–9.
13 As has been stressed by Richard Davis in his important study of the Śaiva Siddhānta ritual, different *pūjās* have specific characteristics, depending on what theological aspects they are intended to emphasize: monotheism versus dualism, efficacy of devotion versus higher knowledge, etcetera. Davis, 1991:38–9.
14 Nammālvar, hymn no. 7.6.6, in Ramanujan, 1993: 30.
15 Kalidos, 1989: 217.
16 Kalidos, 1989: 224.
17 Kalidos, 1989: 244.
18 Sitapati,1989: 174.
19 Campantar, hymn no. I.71.5, in Peterson, 1989: 183.
20 Jeyechandrun, 1985: 214.
21 V. Narayanan, in Hawley and Wulff, 1996:95.
22 Cort, 1995: 326–32.
23 Cort, 2007.
24 Benisti, 1981.
25 Xuanzang, trans. Beal, 1884 (1981): I, 22.
26 Beal,1884 (1981):II,121.
27 Dasimayya, hymn no. 98, in Rāmānujan, 1973: 105.

Chapter 5

1 Ghosh, 1967: 105
2 *Devadāsī* were banned from all temples under the Devadāsī Act of 1947, in an attempt to rid temples of these women because of their sometime association with prostitution; see Kersenblooom-Storey, 1987.
3 Ghosh, 1967: 100–3.
4 Vishwanatha, quoted in Goswamy, 1986: 22.
5 Ghosh, 1967: 107–8.
6 Ghosh, 1967: 155–6.
7 Mukherji, 2001: 247.
8 Guy, 2006.
9 The concept of the back-plate as a replica of the universe is developed by Bautze-Picron, in-press, *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh*, Dhaka.

Chapter 6

1 Cited in Srinivasan, 1997: 194.
2 The complexities of the early meanings of the Śiva *liṅga* are expertly addressed by Srinivasan, 1997: ch.17.
3 Kreisel, 1986: 54–5.
4 F. Staal, 1996: 217.
5 This interpretation is based on the understanding of *mukha* as more than just a head and encompassing its use in mathematics as 'the first of what is to follow', as argued by Srinivasan, 1997: 233.
6 Illustrated Kriesel, 1986: pls. 11, 12.
7 Bakker, 1997, pls. I, II, VII, VIII.
8 Maxwell, 1988.
9 Howard, 1986.
10 Cribb, 1997.
11 Illustrated Kreisel, 1986: pls. 104b, 107, 108, 111, 116.
12 Smith, 1989.
13 Guy, 2004.
14 Kramrisch, 1981: 114.
15 Banerjea, 1968: 7–8.
16 Raven, 1994.
17 Hartel, 1987.
18 Raven, 1994
19 Gonda, 1970: 29.
20 Hartel,1987: 586.
21 Reitz, 2000–2001.
22 This identification is argued by Maxwell, 1988: pls. 3–9. See also Srinivasan, 1997.
23 Maxwell, 1988: pls. 57, 31.
24 The number of *avatāras* in fact varies according to different sectarian traditions, but ten is the most widely accepted account.
25 Guy, 1992.
26 Bautze, 1995.
27 For Durgā's early worship, see Schmid, 2003; for contemporary Durgā worship, see contributions by Mallebrein and Hudson in Dehejia, 1999.
28 Srinivasan, 1997: 282–3. For the early iconography of the Durgā, see Schmid, 2002.
29 *Mārkaṇḍeya*, ch.85,69, cited in Sahai, 975: 197.
30 Mallebrein, 1993 and 1999.
31 Dehejia, 1985.
32 Orr, 2005.
33 Mahalingam, 1967.
34 Sastri, 1916: 226.
35 For two excellent studies on river goddesses, see Viennot, 1964 and Steitencron, 1972.
36 Eck, 1996:148.
37 Temple inscription at Ennayiram; Mahalingam, 1967:32.
38 Sastri, 1916:226.
39 Schulman, 1989.
40 Basavanna, hymn no.563, in Ramanujan, 1973:84.

Bibliography

Abbreviations

AARP *Art and Archaeological Research Papers*
BMQ *British Museum Quarterly*
JISOA *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*
JRAS *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*

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Glossary

abharana: jewellery offered to a deity as part of ritual worship.
abhayamudrā: hand gesture of fearlessness, reassurance, and protection, offered by the deity to the devotee. The right hand is displayed palm outward and the fingers raised.
abhicārika: an icon worshipped for the purpose of inflicting defeat and death on one's enemies. It is looked upon as inauspicious and is worshipped in shrines away from urban centres.
abhiṣeka: 'ritual bathing'; consecration by sprinkling water. The ceremonial lustration of a sacred image with water, milk, honey, curds and so on. Such lustration ceremonies are also performed to confer (and confirm) kingship, marriage, etc.
acalamūrti: an immovable image, normally referring to the stone cult image of a deity housed in the temple's sanctuary (*garbhagṛha*).
acamaha: the reciting of *mantras* during worship (*pūjā*).
acana: offering a seat to a god during worship (*pūjā*).
ācārya: 'observing the rules of his order'; a spiritual guide or teacher who instructs students, especially in the Vedas.
adbhuta: the marvellous sentiment; one of the *rasa*.
ādhivāsa: consecration ceremony for an image.
Ādiśeṣa: 'the primeval Śeṣa', the cosmological world-serpent upon whom Viṣṇu enjoys his sleep between his appearances on earth (*avatāra*).
āgama: 'a corpus of traditional doctrine'; a body of works composed of mythological, ritual and philosophical material, not contained in Vedic texts. The *Āgamas*, are regarded by their followers as the 'fifth Veda'.
aghora: 'not terrific', 'benign'; a euphemistic title of a gracious representation of Śiva.
Agni: 'fire'; Vedic god of the sacrificial fire mediating between men and god, and emblematic of total destruction as a cosmic principle. The principle of annihilation can also apply to ignorance, hence Agni can evoke supreme knowledge (*jñāna*). In later Hinduism worshipped as a guardian (*dikpāla*) of the south-east direction.
Ayannār: 'Lord'; a village guardian deity widely worshipped in rural south India; elevated to the Brahmanical pantheon and venerated in both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava traditions.
akṣamālā: 'garlands of beads'; rosary or string of beads, symbolizing the eternal cycle of time. Specific types associate with particular gods, hence the *rudraksa* worn by Śiva and his followers, and the *tulasī* garland worn by Vaiṣṇavas. The *akṣamālā* is a prescribed attribute of Brahmā and Sarasvatī.
alamkara: ornament and embellishment, without which images are seen as incomplete.
ālvār(s) : 'drowning or immersed (in god)'; South Indian Vaiṣṇava poet-saint *bhaktas*, active between the 6th and 10th centuries. The *ālvārs* are sometimes considered incarnations of Viṣṇu's attributes and worshipped as minor deities.
āmalaka: small tree (Indian gooseberry) associated with Viṣṇu, the fruit of which has inspired the round fluted capping stone on the north Indian temple *śikhara*.
Ambikā: 'mother'; a benign mother goddess worshipped in both Hinduism and Jainism.
amṛta: divine nectar, ambrosia, extracted at the churning of the ocean of milk and brought to the gods by Dhanvantari; a favoured motif in temple decoration, represented stored in an ornate vessel (*amṛtaghata/kalaśa*).
ānanda: 'bliss'; viewed by *bhaktas* both as an essential characteristic of their Lord and as the fruit of spiritual realization.
ānanda-tāṇḍava: 'joy-dance', especially connected with the south Indian bronze representations of Śiva Naṭarāja.
Ananta: 'endless, infinite'; the world-snake on whose coils Viṣṇu reclines in his cosmic sleep; also the king of the *nāgas*.
Anantāśāyana: 'lying upon Ananta', a representation of Viṣṇu reposing on the world-snake Ananta (Śeṣa).
aṅgapūjā: 'body worship'; the act of worship consisting of the bathing, anointing and adorning of a Jain image.
aṅgis: 'limbs'; metal body-part covers for icons, usually of sheet copper or silver; see also *kavaca*.
aṅgula: 'finger, finger's breadth'; a measure used in iconometry.
añjalimudrā: 'two handfuls'; a hand pose of respectful greeting and adoration, in which both hands are clasped together, palms touching and held near the chest. It also symbolizes worship and adoration, hence characteristic of subordinate deities, attendant gods and devotees.
Apasmāra: the personification of ignorance (of truth) and embodying evil forces; represented as a prostrate dwarf figure, upon whom Śiva Naṭarāja dances.
apsarā: 'essence of the waters and clouds'; a female semi-divine celestial being, originally probably a water spirit, now inhabiting Indra's paradise as dancers and musicians, partnered with the *gandharvas*, celestial musicians.
ārādhana: worship or adoration of deities.
āratī (pūjā): a ceremony performed in adoration of a deity. The priest moves clockwise around the image, carrying a tray containing a five-wicked burning lamp, camphor and other items. The ceremony is performed on its own as a standard temple ritual. It is also performed on other occasions such as the first visit of the bridegroom to the bride's house and the birth of a child.
arcā: a cult image intended for worship.
arcana: temple worship, usually referring to private worship offered by or on behalf of an individual devotee.
ardhamaṇḍapa: 'half-pavilion; front porch'; temple intermediary hall or narrow passage connecting the *garbhagṛha* and the *mukhamaṇḍapa*.
Ardhanāriśvara: 'the Lord who is Half-Woman'; Śiva's androgynous form – Śiva combined with Pārvatī in a single body – symbolizing the inseparability of opposites, male and female.
arghya: offering of water and rice employed in daily worship (*pūjā*).
Arjuna: hero of the epic *Mahābhārata*, to whom Kṛṣṇa appears.
āsana: 'sitting posture' of a deity. Also used in yoga to denote standing, lying and dancing positions associated with meditation; in iconography the term also covers other positions such as riding, standing and reclining.
atman: 'essence, principle of life'; derived from the Vedic term for breath, or 'animating principle', *atman* was defined in the Upanishads as 'inner self', the essence of man.
āvāhana: 'invocation' of a god in which the deity is invited to inhabit the icon. This ceremony forms part of the opening ritual of every *pūjā*.
Avalokiteśvara: a Buddhist saviour (*Bodhisattva*) around whom a major cult emerged, as the paramount Buddhist embodiment of compassion.
avatāra: 'descent'; a divine incarnation who intercedes to save the world from imminent peril, usually referring to Viṣṇu's innumerable interventions of which ten are most celebrated (*dasavatāra*).
avyakta: 'not manifest'; a naturally occurring cult object worshipped as the embodiment of a god, such as the *bānaliṅga* quartz stones identified as Śiva's *liṅga* and the *śālagrāma* stone resembling Viṣṇu's conch.

āyāgapata: votive tablet with symbolic pictures. Those with images of Jinas in the centre are amongst the earliest figurative representations in Jain art.

āyudhapurusa: 'weapon-man'; human personifications of a deity's weapon attributes.

Balādeva: 'god of strength', an early deity whose memory is preserved in the god Balarāma, elder brother of Kṛṣṇa.

Balarāma: the elder brother of Kṛṣṇa, but also venerated in his own right as a minor avatāra of Viṣṇu, when he is worshipped as an agricultural deity.

bali: 'offering, gift, sacrifice'; part of a daily worship (*pūjā*) performed by the householder in which an offering of grain or rice is made to household divinities.

bāṇaliṅga: small, oval quartz stones found in the Narmada River worshipped as an aniconic *liṅga*. Used in domestic worship, where they are set on a bronze stand, or worn as a talismanic amulet.

bhadrā: *'good'*, auspicious sentiment, most widely associated with Śiva.

Bhagavad Gītā: 'Song of the Lord'; a *purāṇa* dedicated to the teachings and revelations of Kṛṣṇa (Bhagavada), as revealed to the warrior Arjuna. Sixth book of the *Mahābharata* epic.

Bhagavatī: 'the Lady'; a gracious aspect of Pārvatī.

Bhairava: 'terrible, frightful'; a fearsome (*urga*) aspect of Śiva, with links to his procurer, the wild outcast Rudra. Typically represented accompanied by a wild dog, and invoked in rituals to destroy enemies.

bhakta: 'devotee'; ardent worshipper of a deity.

bhakti: 'devotion'; intense, uncompromising devotion to a personal god, aspiring to mystical union with the divine.

bhaṅga: 'bending, bowing'; flexed posture of the body, as described in dance and sculpture.

bhayanaka: the terrible sentiment; one of the *rasa*.

Bhikṣāṭana: a representation of Śiva as a wandering mendicant, stricken by the guilt of cutting off one of Brahmā's heads until cleansed of sin by the waters of the Ganges.

bhoga: 'enjoyment, possession, wealth'; a class of images worshipped with the aim of obtaining wealth and prosperity.

Bhū (*devī*): 'Earth goddess'; the personification of the earth, and one of the two consorts of Viṣṇu.

bhūmisparśamudrā: 'touching the earth'; hand gesture in which the seated image touches the earth with the fingertips of the right hand. The gesture is symbolic of the Buddha at Bodhgaya, calling the earth as a witness to his spiritual triumph.

bibhasta: the odious sentiment; one of the *rasa*.

bīja: 'seed, semen'; mystic syllable which forms an essential part of a *mantra*.

Bodhgaya: Bihar, eastern India. The holy place of Buddhism par excellence, where the Buddha attained enlightenment. The site is marked by the Mahābodhi temple and remains the single most important Buddhist pilgrim centre.

Bodhisattva: 'one whose essence is perfect knowledge'; a Buddhist saviour, understood as one who is a Buddha-elect, but has postponed Buddhahood in order to assist others to attain liberation (*mokṣa*). *Bodhisattvas* are distinguished from the Buddha in art through the wearing of princely garments, jewels and ornaments.

Brahmā: the Brahmanical deity of sacrifice but whose position progressively declined to that of a minor supporting deity, even though notionally ranked alongside Śiva and Viṣṇu.

Brahman or Brahmin: the highest caste in India, generally synonymous with the priestly class, versed in Brahmanical learning and entitled to perform Hindu rites and sacrifices. Authors of the *Brahmanas*, a body of literature appended to the *Vedas*, designed to guide them in hymns and performance of various rituals.

Bṛhatsaṁhita: *śāstric* text describing the measuring and proportioning system of *tālamana*; attributed to the 6th century author Varahamihirā.

Buddha: 'enlightened', 'awakened'; the historic Prince Siddharta of the Gautama clan, who attained enlightenment in the 6th–5th century BCE in eastern India. In Hīnayāna Buddhism, only one buddha is acknowledged, the historic one, whilst in the Mahāyāna and Vajrayāna schools a multitude exist, present and future.

Buddhavamsa: chronicle of the Buddhas.

caitya: a prayer or temple hall in which a *stūpa* is placed.

caitya vandana: veneration of a funerary or relic monument.

cakra: 'wheel', 'disk'; an ancient weapon, possibly also a sun symbol; as an attribute of Viṣṇu it appears to embody both meanings.

cakrastambha: 'wheel-pillar'; pillar which bears a *cakra* as its symbol, identified with the Buddhist *dharma* (law).

cakravartin: 'world sovereign', 'universal ruler'; both temporal and spiritual kingship. The *cakravartin* considered to be the epitome of physical and spiritual perfection, possessing the thirty-two primary signs of excellence and many more secondary signs.

cala: 'moving, movable'; a devotional icon designed for processional use.

cāmara: fly-whisk or fan, the bushy tail of a yak (*cāmara*) used as a long brush for whisking off insects, or as a fan. One of the insignia of royalty and divinity, especially associated with the river goddess Gaṅgā and her capacity to cleanse sinners. Also known as *caurī* ..

Cāmuṇḍā: a terrifying form of the goddess Durgā, symbolizing delusion and death.

caturmukhaliṅga: four-faced Śiva *liṅga*.

caurī: fly-whisk (see *cāmara*).

chandas: 'metre' or 'rhythm', specifically in relation to sacrificial ritual and associated chants.

chattra: 'parasol'; an ancient sign of royal power, shared with divine rulers, most notably the Vedic gods, Varuna and Sūrya.

cire-perdue: 'lost wax'; metal-casting technique in which a model is first made of wax, which is then enclosed in a clay mould. The wax is melted out through a vent, and molten metal (usually bronze) is run in to replace it.

citra: 'clear, bright'; an image in the round.

Citrasūtra: together with the *Citralakṣaṇa*, these texts provide the most formal statements on the canons and conventions of Indian art, and embody the *śilpaśūstras*, guides to good practices in the execution of the visual arts.

Dakṣiṇāmūrti: Śiva as the divine master of knowledge and teacher of all the sciences, including yoga and music. Represented seated on Mt Kailāsa, facing south to the plains of India, teaching the *riṣis* yoga and divine knowledge (*jñāna*). Positioned on the external south wall of a temple, particularly in south India.

dana: 'act of giving'; a gift or charitable donation, especially in a religious context.

darpaṇa: 'mirror'; the mirror represents those aspects of a divinity that are not manifest, most notably in association with Śiva.

darśana: 'seeing [of one god]'; the auspicious viewing of the cult image of the deity by a devotee.

dasavatāra: 'ten-descents'; divine incarnations of Viṣṇu who intercedes to save the world from imminent peril on ten celebrated occasions.

devadāsī: 'slaves of the god'; female temple attendants whose duties were divided between entertainment of the god and sacral prostitution.

devī: 'Goddess'; generic term for the numerous goddesses who represent the female creative energy (*śaktī*), the most eminent of whom is Pārvatī, Śiva's consort, especially in her terrific form as Durgā or Kālī.

Devī Mahatmya: 'Glorification of the Great Goddess'; *c.*8th century text celebrating the victories of Devī over various demonic forces (*asuras*) and is recited by her devotees.

dhārāṇīs: spells or magical charms, the recitation of which protects against demons, diseases and other malign influences, especially popular in Buddhism.

dharma: 'law'; established belief and practice, personified as a Brahmanical deity of that name. Adopted in Buddhism to represent the Buddha's teachings.

dharmacakramudrā: 'wheel of the law'; hand gesture in Buddhism representing the turning of the wheel of the law.

dhūpadīpa: offering of incense and light to an image, as part of pūjā.

dhvaja: 'banner' carrying the insignia of a god or more often his vehicle (*vāhana*), displayed in a temple and regarded as one of the eight auspicious objects (*aṣṭamaṅgala*) of a temple.

dhyānamudrā: hand gesture denoting meditation.

dikpālas: minor deities assigned the task of protecting the world from demons, each assigned one of the eight spatial directions.

Durgā: 'inaccessible'; a composite deity embodying numerous local deities who assumed prominence as an expression of Pārvatī's personality. Worshipped in many forms, most popularly as Mahiṣāsuramardinī, the slayer of the demon Mahiṣa.

dvārapāla: 'door-keeper'; guardians, usually a pair, flanking the temple entrance. They often have demonic features and are considered *yakśa* converts to the deity they protect.

ekamukhaliṅga: one-faced Śiva *liṅga*.

gadā: 'mace, club'; the emblem of destruction and a symbol of strength and power. One of the main attributes of Viṣṇu and Hanumān.

Gaja-Lakṣmī: a form of the goddess Lakṣmī, a mother and fertility goddess, represented with two elephants lustrating her from pitchers held in their trunks.

gaṇa: obese dwarf-like figures, derived from *yakśa* cults, adopted in Hinduism as Śiva's faithful attendants. Gaṇeśa is acknowledged as their leader.

gandharva: a male semi-divine celestial being referred to in the ancient *Ṛgveda*, who now inhabits the sky as musician to the gods, partnered with the *apsarās*. Adopted for temple and sculptural embellishment by Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism alike.

Gaṇeśa: 'Lord of the Ganas'; the elephant-headed son of Śiva and Pārvatī, venerated as the remover of obstacles and as the god of wisdom. Lord of the *gaṇas*, the obese *yakśas* from whom he is probably descended. Also known as Gaṇapati.

gandham: to anoint an image with sandalwood during *pūjā*.

Gaṅgā: a river goddess, the personification of the river Ganges, and linked to Śaiva cosmogony.

Gaṅgādhara: 'supporter of the Gaṅgā'; one name by which Śiva is known, linked to a myth in which Śiva took Gaṅgā as a second bride, much to Pārvatī's chagrin.

garbhagṛha: 'womb-chamber'; the sanctum sanctorum of a Hindu temple, in which the cult image is housed.

garuḍa: a mythical eagle, typically represented as half-bird, half-human. Associated with Viṣṇu, who garuḍa serves as his vehicle (vāhana).

Garuḍastamba: a flag column bearing an image of Garuḍa, placed at the entrance of Vaiṣṇava temples.

ghaṇṭā: 'bell'; symbol of the mystical primal sound which is seen as the origin of creation.

Gītā Govinda: 'Song of the Cowherd'; an erotic poem by the 12th-century court poet Jayadeva, written in Bengal, which recounts the early life and loves of Kṛṣṇa and the cow-maids (*gopīs*).

gopura: ornamented, pyramidal gateway of a temple, especially a feature of south Indian Dravidian temple architecture.

grāmadevatā: 'village-goddess'; village deities of unknown ancestry, assumed to belong to early *yakśa* cults associated with the natural elements. Shrines to such deities dominate rural south India, usually in the form of a simple sacrificial platform and a rough-hewn stone representing a goddess or a *yoni*.

hamsa: goose; vehicle of Brahmā and symbol of supreme spiritual attainment, and in Buddhism came to represent the far-flung dissemination of Buddhist teachings.

Hanumān: 'heavy jawed'; the monkey chief and ally of Rāma. Son of the wind god Vayu and Anjana, Hanumān attracted a cult following, largely because of his martial prowess and being seen as embodying the virtues of loyal friendship.

harati: the burning of camphor in offering to a deity.

Harihara: a syncretic form, representing Viṣṇu (Hari) and Śiva (Hara), combined into a single cult image.

Hārītī: an early mother goddess and protector of children, usually seen as the wife of Kubera, chief of the *yakśas*.

Harivaṁśa: 'lineage, or genealogy of Hari' (Viṣṇu); this exists as an appendix to the *Mahābharata*, and is believed to be the earliest of the Purāṇas.

harmikā: square railings at the top of a *stūpa*, usually enclosing a multi-tiered umbrella.

hasta: 'hand'; refers to particular positions of the hands and arms which are invested with meaning.

hasya: the comic sentiment; one of the *rasa*.

Hīnayāna: 'The Lesser Vehicle'; earliest school of Buddhism which claims allegiance to the 'original' teachings of the Buddha; as practised today in Sri Lanka and mainland Southeast Asia.

homa (pūjā): a fire offering to the gods celebrated by pouring ghee onto the sacrificial flames.

Indra: the Vedic god of the elements and the earliest king of the gods, whose weapon was the *vajra* ('thunderbolt lightning'), represented as a double-ended trident. Demoted in later Hinduism as a minor directional guardian (*dikpāla*), though retained some status in Buddhism and Jainism.

Jagannātha: 'Lord of the World'; a form of Kṛṣṇa, worshipped in Orissa and Bengal, with the cult centred at Puri where he is revered as part of a triad with his sister Subhadrā and his brother Balabhadrā (Balarāma).

jaṭā: knot of matted hair, especially of Śiva, and a hallmark of his followers (*ṛiṣi*)

Jātaka(s): 'birth stories'; stories of the previous incarnations of the historical Buddha as a *Bodhisattva*, and popularly represented on Buddhist temple and *stūpa* architecture since at least the Sunga period (2nd century BCE).

Jina: 'victorious'; another name for a Jain saviour or *tīrthaṅkara* ('ford-finder'). Jainism claims 24 historical Jinas, the most recent of whom is Mahāvīra, a contemporary of the historical Buddha.

Jinendra: 'Jina-King'; term used for an icon during *pūjā* performed by Jain worshippers.

jñāna: 'knowledge'; magical or mystical knowledge that was required by priests to communicate with the divine.

Jyeṣṭhā: the goddess of ill-luck, misfortune and disease; a village deity later cast as the elder sister of Lakṣmī. Widely worshipped in south India up until the 10th century.

Kailāsa: the mythical mountain, sited in the Himalayas, where Śiva resides with his family.

kāla: the arts.

kalaśa: 'vase'; the symbol of abundance, wisdom and immortality, it contains the nectar of eternal life (*amṛta*). It is the attribute of Brahmā, Śiva as a teacher and Lakṣmī.

Kālī: a terrific aspect of Śiva's *śakti*, represented as a hideous woman, embodying the natural force of destruction, and simultaneously embodying Supreme Power. Sometimes described as a form of Durgā, and in south India worshipped as the goddess of cholera.

Kalpasūtra: a Jain text including the rules for monastic ritual and daily conduct.

Kalyāṇasundara: 'the wedding of the charming one'; representation of Śiva and Pārvatī's wedding ceremony, usually attended by Viṣṇu and Lakṣmī, and occasionally Brahmā. At Madurai this is celebrated as Śiva's marriage to the local goddess Mīnākṣī.

Kāmākṣī: 'whose looks are amorous'; a benign aspect of the goddess regarded in south India as a form of Śiva's *śakti*, and worshipped as the presiding deity at her temple at Kanchipuram; elsewhere in India venerated as a wrathful form of Durgā.

karma: 'action, ritual act, sacrifice'; associated with the good or bad intentions behind an action which influence the performer's future life in a positive or negative way.

Kārttikeya: a form of Skanda, the martial son of Śiva and Pārvatī. Widely revered in south India as Subramanya and Murugan.

kavaca: 'armour'; metal body-cover for a religious image, for use during worship both with immovable images and portable icons.

kāyotsarga: 'setting free the body'; a meditation position in which the mendicant stands for prolonged periods with his arms held away from the body; a favoured posture of Jain monks and Jinas, especially Pārśvanātha.

kinnara, kinnarī: male and female semi-divine musicians to the gods, represented with human faces on bird bodies. They form part of the retinue of Kubera.

Kirāta: 'the hunter'; an epithet of Śiva in a gracious aspect.

kīrttimukha: 'halo-face'; a ferocious lion face adorning temple door lintels and decorative frames (*prabhā-toraṇa*) which frame the deity. Intended to terrify unbelievers and protect the faithful. Also a popular motif on personal and temple jewellery.

kosa: 'sheath'; a metal cover for covering a stone *liṅga* during worship, often adorned with one or more 'faces' of Śiva.

Kṛṣṇa: worshipped as an avatar of Viṣṇu, especially at his birth place near Mathura. Origins as a local pastoral deity, and identified as the hero of the *Mahābhārata* epic and expounder of the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

Kubera: a former *yakśa* reinvented as the Hindu god of riches and productivity. In Buddhism best known as Jambhala.

Kumbhamelā: 'pot festival'; probably the largest gathering of Hindu ascetics and holy men of all sects, which takes place at regular three-year interval at Prayaga (Allahabad), Hardwar, Nasik and Ujjain. These sites relate to the Churning of the Ocean of Milk, when four drops of the elixir of immortality fell at the sites.

kuruna: the pathetic sentiment; one of the *rasa*.

lakṣaṇa: 'mark, sign, symbol, attribute'; the auspicious identifying attributes of a deity. In treatises on physiognomy, the *lakṣaṇas* may also be marks of the body that may be either auspicious or inauspicious.

Lakṣmī: originally a mother and fertility goddess and a personification of the earth, subsequently linked to riches and good fortune. Venerated as Viṣṇu's primary consort. Also referred to as Śri.

Lakulīśa: 'Lord of the Club'; a form of Śiva favoured by the Paśupata sect.

liṅga: aniconic pillar-symbol of Śiva, typically in phallic form evoking Śiva's progenerative powers; a fertility symbol. Especially connected with Śiva as *bijavin*, the 'Giver of Seed'.

Liṅgobhavamūrti: a representation of Śiva as he emerges from the blazing *liṅga* to crush the pride of Brahmā and Viṣṇu, a popular image in south Indian temples.

Lokeśvara: 'Lord of the World'; a group of deities associated with both Hinduism and Buddhism with an emphasis on emanations of future saviours.

Mahābhārata: the epic poem narrating the war between the descendants of Bharata, the Kauravas and the Pandayas, written between the 2nd century BCE and the 5th century CE.

Mahābodhi temple: the temple that marks the site of the bodhi tree, beneath which the Buddha experienced *bodhi* (enlightenment), at Bodhgaya in Bihar, eastern India.

Mahādeva: 'the Great God'; Śiva as the supreme deity, usually represented with three heads as seen most sublimely at Elephanta.

Mahākāla: 'the Great Time – Death'; an adoption of Śiva into Vajrayāna Buddhism as a principle protector.

Mahamaham: the greatest festival celebrated in Kumbakonam every eleven to twelve years. During the festival, metal images of deities from the main temples are paraded on palanquins or chariots through the town, and pilgrims flock to bath in the temple tank.

Mahāvīra: 'the great hero'; the 24th Jain *tīrthaṅkara*, active in Bihar in the 6th–5th century BCE and regarded as the founder of Jainism.

Mahā-Viṣṇu: form of Viṣṇu accompanied by his two wives, Śri Devī and Bhū Devī.

Mahāyāna: 'great vehicle'; north Indian school of Buddhism which incorporated tantric elements from Hinduism, when it is known as Vajrayāna. Central belief is in the potential of all believers to attain, after a succession of rebirths, *Bodhisattva* status, a necessary step to securing *nirvāṇa*.

Maheśvara: 'Great Lord'; an epithet of Śiva as the Supreme Lord.

Mahiṣāsuramardinī: Durgā as the slayer of the buffalo-demon Mahiṣa. In this form Durgā was given all the supernatural weapons of the gods to enable her to slay the demon, and is thus represented most typically as eight- or ten-armed.

makara: a mythical sea-creature, combining elements of fish, crocodile, lion and elephant, symbolizing the life-giving power of the waters.

mālā: necklace or garland, generally made from the seeds of fruit from a tree sacred to the god whom the devotee serves and seen to have protective powers for the wearer; hence *rudrāksa* stones are used for Śaiva *mālās*, *tulasī* seeds for Vaiṣṇavas.

mana: proportions necessary for the harmonious creation of a work of art.

Manasara: 7th century treatise on architecture.

maṇḍala: a specific sacred diagram with magical properties (*yantra*).

maṇḍapa: a pillared hall, usually for the use of devotees, and sometimes serving as a resting place for the deity during ritual parading (*pradakṣinā*).

Mañjuśrī: a pre-eminent Buddhist *Bodhisattva*, the embodiment of wisdom; hence the Buddhist counterpart of Brahmā. Paired with the goddess Prajñāpāramitā, the personification of a wisdom text. Both have a manuscript book (*pustaka*) as their principal attribute, usually borne on a open lotus.

mantra: a magic formula expressed as a mystical syllable. Serves as a spoken or 'thought-form' equivalent of the physical representation of a deity, and intended to be a means whereby the devotee can gain salvation either by reciting it aloud (*kanthika*) or by repeating it silently in his mind (*ajapa*).

Manu: the primeval progenitor of mankind as described in the *Ṛgveda*.

Māra: 'destroyer, death'; Buddhist equivalent of the Hindu deity Kāma, representing the forces of evil who attempted to obstruct the Buddha's enlightenment.

Mārkaṇḍeya: a sage and devotee of Viṣṇu, who begged Viṣṇu to rescue him from drowning when the earth was engulfed by water.

Mathurā: ancient 'city of the gods' on the Yamuna River, in Uttar Pradesh, northern India, birth-place of Kṛṣṇa, and capital of the Kushans.

mātṛkās: 'mother'; Hindu mother goddesses, later sometimes described as *śaktis*, the female personifications of divine energy. Frequently represented as 'Seven Mothers' (*Saptamātṛkās*).

Maya: the name of Devī – Mahādevī or Mahāmāya – in her dynamic aspect as Śakti, source of the universe and creative power.

Mīnākṣī: 'fish-eyed' (of great beauty); ancient presiding goddess of the Pandyan kingdom of Madurai, married in local mythology to Śiva, hence worshipped as a form of Pārvatī at the Mīnākṣī-Sundareśvara temple, Madurai.

mithuna: 'loving couple'; popularly represented in Hindu and early Buddhist art.

Mt Meru: mythical mountain marking the middle of the cosmological continent Jambudvipa, believed to be located in the Himalayas.

mokṣa: 'liberation, release' and in some Hindu contexts, salvation, freedom from *samsara*, the endless round of birth, death and rebirth.

mṛga: 'antelope'; Śiva is depicted with an antelope on his left hand, as a sign that he is the lord of nature.

Mucalinda: king of the *nāgas*, who sheltered the Buddha from a violent storm at Bodhgaya, hence Mucalinda-Buddha.

mudrā: 'sign, token'; symbolic hand gesture or pose used by deities to communicate with devotees.

mukhaliṅga: face-*liṅga*'; Śiva *liṅga* addorsed with the raised face(s) of Śiva.

mūrti: 'manifestation', 'form'; an anthropomorphic representation of a god, that is, an image or statue.

nāga: 'snake'; associated with the water underworld, and worshipped in ancient Indian serpent cults as a symbol with fertility. Widely appropriated by later Indian religions.

Nāginī: Jain goddess, counter-part of the Hindu Manasā.

naivedya: offering of cooked food for an image – a rite that forms part of the *pūjā*.

Nandikeśvara: 'lord Nandi'; an anthropomorphic form of Nandi, represented as a standing human male with bull's horns, which on occasions resembles a *triśūla*.

Nandi: 'joyful'; the calf-bull associated with Śiva from the earliest period when he was probably also understood as a form of Śiva. Assumed later role as Śiva's *vāhana*, but continued to be worshipped in his own right.

Narasiṁha: 'man-lion'; an *avatāra* of Viṣṇu, who appeared on earth to slay the evil ruler Hiranyakaśipu. Seen as the embodiment of valour, martial strength and courage so favoured by rulers and warriors; hence 'Narasiṁha' was a favoured reign-title.

Naṭarāja: 'Lord of Dance'; Śiva represented as the cosmological dancer, typically represented in the *tāṇdava-ānanda* ('dance of bliss') posture, as performed by Śiva at Chidambaram, south India.

Nāṭyāśāstra: an anonymous text on drama, music and dancing, traditionally attributed to the ancient sage Bharata. Contains detailed instructions regarding *nāṭya*-dance forms and bodily postures (*aṅgikas*), hand poses (*mudrās*), and so on.

Navagraha: 'nine planets'; the nine planetary deities, shared by Hinduism and Buddhism. Represents the sun (Ravi), moon (Chanda), Mars (Maṅgala), Mercury (Budha), Jupiter (Bṛhaspati), Venus (Śukra), Saturn (Śani), ascending form (Rāhu), and descending form (Ketu).

nāyaṇmār: 'leaders'; revered Śaiva saints, remembered for their absolute devotion and a life dedicated to the composition of devotional poetry and songs of praise.

nirvāṇa: a state of spiritual liberation achieved by the extinction of all senses, leading to the end of the curse of perpetual reincarnation. A state achieved after death by those who attained enlightenment.

nityapūjā: daily religious rituals performed routinely by a Brahman priest.

pāda: 'foot', but also used to denote a [sacred] foot-print, most typically of Viṣṇu (Viṣṇu-pāda) or the Buddha (Buddha-pāda). Taken as a symbolic indicator of a divine presence.

paddhatis: Hindu ritual handbooks.

padma: 'lotus'; an ancient Indian symbol, emblematic of creation. Associated with purity of descent and divine birth, hence represented as the throne-support of many deities; also held by deities as an attribute denoting purity.

pañcaloha: 'five metals'; an alloy for the casting of religious icons containing five metals, most typically copper, brass, tin, lead and iron, used particularly in south India.

Pārśvanātha: the 23rd Jain saviour or ford-crosser (*tīrthaṇkara*), identified by the cobra-hood framing his head (cf. Mucalinda Buddha).

Pārvatī: 'the mountain daughter'; the gracious and peaceful aspect of Śiva's *śakti*. Pārvatī won Śiva's affections by the practising of austerities which impressed the ascetic lord.

Paśupati: 'Lord of the Wild Animals'; an early form of Śiva as *yogin*, a probable precursor of which is represented on seals of the Harappan civilization as a horned male figure surrounded by animals.

pīṭha: seat or throne; typically the pedestal of an image, also adorned with a back-plate (*prabhā*).

prabhā: 'circle of flames'; decorative nimbus used to frame a sculptural image of a deity, usually represented emitting flames and with a *kīrttimukha* motif at the summit of the arch.

pradakṣiṇa: 'moving to the right'; a clockwise ritual circumambulation of a cult object, shrine or temple sanctuary, undertaken as an expression of reverence and devotion.

Prajñāpāramitā: 'perfection of knowledge'; a Mahayānist Buddhist goddess who is the personification of the text of the same name, symbolized by a palm-leaf manuscript (*pustaka*). Usually paired with Mañjuśrī and seen as the Buddhist counterpart of the Hindu Lakṣmī.

prākāra: 'bounding wall' of a temple. There are generally up to five such enclosure walls radiating out from the sanctuary, occasionally seven, as seen at the Sri Ranganatha temple at Srirangam.

prāṇa: 'breath, life'; a sculptural image is given the life-breath through a consecration ritual known as *prāṇapratiṣṭhā* in which the *prāṇa* is instilled in the image for the first time.

prāṇayāma: 'breath control', a term applied to the practice of breathing techniques used in Hindu occultism and meditative exercises (yoga).

prasāda: '[divine] favour or grace'; the food offered to the deity in Hindu ritual, which is then distributed to devotees as an act of 'grace' by the Lord to his devotees.

pratimā: 'reflected image'; a cult image or other representation of a divinity, best understood as a symbolic reflection of the deity's true identity, to serve as focus for worship and ritual.

pratimākarā: 'image-maker'; artisans or sculptors who make representations of deities (*pratimās*).

pratiṣṭhā: the act of gifting and consecrating an image to a temple.

Pṛthivī: the Earth and its personification as a goddess, identified with Bhūmi-devī ('Earth goddess'), the second wife of Viṣṇu.

pūjā: 'honour', 'worship'; series of ritual acts to honour the deity, performed by the presiding Brahman priests at a temple, by village priests (*pūjārī*) who perform at local shrines, or by the householder at the home shrine. It is an act of ritual hospitality to the deity in which the offerings most typically consist of food and clothing.

puṇya: the acquisition of religious merit.

Purāṇa(s): corpus of Sanskrit literature recounting myths and legends concerned principally with the exploits of the gods.

pūrṇakalaśa: 'full vase'; flowering vase motif, a recurrent symbol of fertility throughout Indian art.

Puruṣa: 'man'; the cosmic primeval man, from whom all descend.

pustaka: 'book'; the palm-leaf manuscript when held as an attribute by a Hindu deity denotes the inherited wisdom of the *Vedas* and *āgamas*, and when held by a Buddhist deity usually denotes the Perfection of Wisdom (Prajñāpāramitā) text.

Rādhā: the leading *gopī* who was Kṛṣṇa's favourite mistress in the *bhakti* cult. She is also regarded as an *avatāra* of Lakṣmī, and in south India is known as Bhūmidevī (Bhūdevī), the second wife of Viṣṇu.

Rāhu: 'seizer'; the cause of eclipses. In legend, Rāhu swallows the sun and moon, causing darkness on earth, and is represented sometimes by a dismembered head.

rājalīlāsana: 'seated in royal ease'; a relaxed sitting posture for royalty and deities.

rākṣasa: 'a kind of demon'; a descendant of Kāśyapa and Khasā.

Rāma: the 7th *avatāra* of Visnu who, as the king of Ayodhya, appeared to counter the threat to world order posed by the demon Ravana. These struggles provide the central stories of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic.

Rāmāyaṇa: the epic Sanskrit narrative recounting Rāma's adventures, composed between 350 BCE and 250 CE, the original author being the mythical Vālmīki.

rasa: 'flavour, essence'; the essential aesthetic experience; hence *rasika*, connoisseur, the most susceptible to *rasa*.

ratha: 'temple chariot', 'car'; designed to transport processional images of the deities during temple festival processions.

rathayātrā: 'chariot procession'; this term most specifically refers to the chariot procession of Lord Jagannātha at Puri. Similar processions occur elsewhere.

rathotsava: festival procession involving the use of temple chariots.

raudra: 'terrific'; terrifying, awesome aspect of a god.

Ṛgveda: Veda = 'knowledge'; the sacred books of the Vedic religion, regarded as divine revelation and the canon on which later Hinduism was based. Comprise four parts: *Vedas* (collections of hymns), *Brahmanas* (priestly treatises), *Aranyakas* (esoteric texts), and *Upanishads* (philosophical and mystical treatises).

ṛiṣi: 'inspired poet or sage'; described as the sons of Brahmā, semi-divine.

Rudra: a Vedic storm god who appears to have been the source of the earliest form of Śiva, especially in his terrific forms.

Sadāśiva: 'Ever-lasting Śiva'; a manifestation of Śiva with five aspects in one form, as seen at Elephanta.

sādhu: a Hindu teacher (*guru*) or holy man, who has attained magical powers through ascetic austerities.

Śaiva: the cult of Śiva, his followers referred to as Śaivite.

śākta: cult of the goddess represented by personifications of the female energy. Central personalities of the cult are linked to Śiva: Pārvatī, Ambikā, Durgā and Kālī.

śakti: 'energy', 'power'; the energy of a male deity personified in female form, understood as his female counterpart. In the Hindu context, śakti refers specifically to the violent (*ugra*)-forms of Devī, namely Durgā and Kālī.

Śākyamuni: 'sage of the Śākya family'; the historical Buddha, especially so named in Tibet.

śālabhañjikā: 'breaking the branch of the *śāla*-tree'; the quintessential *yakśi* pose in which the tree spirit entwined the *śāla* tree, as seen on the gateways (*toraṇas*) at Sanchi and other early Buddhist sites.

śālagrāma: the black fossil stone from Nepal worshipped as a natural icon of Viṣṇu because of the stone's resemblance to Viṣṇu's conch; see *avyakta*.

saṅgha: 'assembly or community'; of Buddhist or Jain monks; hence *saṅghārāma*, monastery.

śaṅkha: 'conch-shell'; a shell used as trumpet, in battle and ritual. Associated with Viṣṇu as a principal attribute and used as a cult object for libations during *pūjā*.

saṅnyāsin: 'renouncer'; a Brahman at the fourth and last stage of life in which he abandons engagement with family life; also refers to ascetic followers of Śiva (cf. *sādhu*).

Śāntinātha: the 16th Jain saviour or ford-crosser (*tīrthaṅkara*), identified by the antelope (*mṛga*).

Saptamātṛkā: 'Seven Mothers'; namely Brahmānī, Māheśvarī, Kaumārī, Vaiśnavī, Vārāhī, Indrānī and Chamundī. Apart from Chamundī, the remaining six are the śaktis of their respective male counterparts: Brahmā, Śiva, Kumara, Viṣṇu, Varāha, Indra.

Sarasvatī: 'the Flowering One'; a river goddess of knowledge, music and the arts; often regarded as the wife of Brahmā.

śāstra(s): a treatise or manual relating to a specific field of practical knowledge – such as statecraft (arthaśāstra), performing (Nāṭyāśāstra) and visual arts (śilpaśāstra), the art of love and so on.

śayana: the reclining posture, as assumed by Viṣṇu on Śeṣa.

siddha: 'perfected [one]'; those endowed with supernatural powers attained through austerities and extreme yogic practices.

śikhara: 'mountain peak'; term applied to the tapering spire of a north Indian temple.

śilpaśāstra: 'art/craft manual'; texts providing both technical and aesthetic guidance to those empowered to make arts/crafts.

śilpi/śilpin: craftsman, a practitioner who makes art and has studied the *śilpaśāstras*; see also *pratimākarā*.

Śiva: 'Auspicious One'; a complex, many-faceted deity, creator, destroyer, both auspicious and dangerous. Along with Viṣṇu and Devī, the principal cult deity of Hindu India.

Skanda: a young warrior, identified as the son of Śiva and Pārvatī, worshipped as the god of war. Also known as Kārttikeya, and in south India as Murugan and Subrahmanya. His *vāhana* is the peacock, and the cock his attribute.

soma: 'essence'; plant juice with an hallucinogenic effect, used in special rituals in Vedic times; later identified with the nectar of immortality, *amṛta*.

Somāskanda: family ensemble of Śiva, Pārvatī and the child Skanda, especially popular in south India in the Pallava and Chola periods.

sreni: 'guild'; especially of artisans.

Śri/Śrī Devī: goddess personifying wealth, prosperity and beauty. Identified early with Lakṣmī, consort of Viṣṇu.

śringgara: the erotic sentiment; one of the *rasa*.

sruti: 'hearing'; sacred knowledge of the Veda heard by the ancient *ṛiṣis* and orally transmitted from generation to generation.

stambha: 'pillar'; wooden post or stone pillar which had its origins with the sacrificial rites of the Vedic period.

sthalapurāṇa: 'story of the place'; a specific literary genre narrating the foundation myth of a temple and merits gained by worshipping its deities.

sthānaka/sthāna: representation of a standing deity.

sthaṇḍila: 'piece of open ground' squared and levelled for large Vedic sacrifices.

sthāpana: 'fixing'; the *pūjā* which accompanies the erecting of an image for the first time; part of the ritual consecration procedure.

sthapati: artisan, architect, artist, metal sculptor, maker of icons.

stotra: hymn of praise, laudatory song, in praise of a god.

stūpa: a dome-shaped structure originating as a funerary mound, closely associated with the Buddha and his relics. In miniature form, used as reliquaries and votive containers.

Subhadrā: goddess identified as the daughter of Vāsudeva, sister of Kṛṣṇa and wife of Arjuna; worshipped as part of the Jagannātha triad at Puri, Orissa.

suddhi: purification rites, undertaken before embarking on a ritual activity, including the making of religious images.

suparṇa: an eagle or vulture noted for its strength and swiftness, possibly the prototype of *garuḍa* who was regarded as king of *suparṇas*.

Sūrya: the sun god, probably introduced from Iran.

Śvetāmbara: 'white-clad'; one of the principal sects of Jainism.

takṣaṇa: sculptor, responsible for cutting stone images for installation in temples, and casting metal images for processional use.

tāla: unit of measurement in iconometry.

tālamana: 'measure, proportion'; canon of proportion according to which sacred images are made. Iconometry of sacred images is detailed in the *śilpaśāstras*.

tāṇḍava: a wild dance, as performed by Śiva in cemeteries and burning grounds; also characteristic of the Buddhist Vajradhara.

tantra(s): non-Vedic ritual texts concerned principally with magical and mystical practices, common to all Indian religions.

tapas: 'heat'; the heat generated by ascetic yogic practices, a source of great spiritual and physical power.

Tārā: goddess appearing in many forms, principally Buddhist. Sometimes seen as female *Bodhisattva*.

teppa: floating replica temple, for processing the portable image of the presiding deity on the temple tank during festivals.

Tevaram: the corpus of devotional poems composed by the Śaiva poet-saints (*nāyaṇmār*).

Theravāda: southern school of Buddhism, especially as practised in Sri Lanka, with claims to be the purest form of Buddhism, true to the Buddha's original teachings; see also Hīnayāna.

tīrtha: 'bathing place'; a sacred bathing place, of which 4,000 are acknowledged in India as places of pilgrimage.

tīrthaṇkara: 'ford-crosser'; the 24 Jain saviours, of whom Mahāvīra is the most recent and historically verifiable.

toraṇa: arch, doorway, gate, especially marking a ceremonial or religious way.

Trimūrti: three-headed syncretic composition of Brahmā, Śiva and Viṣṇu. Term may also refer to images that represent three aspects of the one god.

triratna: 'three jewels'; Buddhist symbol representing the Buddha, the teachings (*dharma*) and the community of monks (*saṅgha*).

triśūla: trident, magical weapon employed by the gods against evil. Śiva's principal weapon, also worshipped as a cult object, and carried by his followers. Its origins may be traced to Poseidon's trident, introduced from West Asia.

Trivikrama: 'three steps'; Viṣṇu taking three strides to encircle the world, possibly reflecting the sun's ability to encircle the globe in its orbit.

Umā: the mother aspect of Pārvatī, and the preferred term of identification in south India.

Umāmaheśvara: ensemble of Śiva and Pārvatī, usually with Nandi and sometimes with Ganeśa.

upacāra: offering vessel, used for lustrating images of the gods.

Upanishads: corpus of Sanskrit philosophical texts, composed circa 800–600 BCE.

ūrdhvaliṅga: 'having an erect phallus', emblematic of Śiva's fertility and yogic restraint.

urga: 'violent'; vengeful and violent representations of deities, particularly of Śiva.

ūrṇā: forehead mark, identified as a distinguishing mark of the Buddha (*mahāpuruṣa laksaṇa*).

uṣṇīṣa: headdress or coiffure which in Buddhism became an auspicious mark of the Buddha, emblematic of the Buddha's higher knowledge and consciousness.

utsava-mūrti: 'festival image'; movable images, generally bronze, paraded during temple festivals.

vāhana: 'vehicle'; the animal mount of a deity.

Vaikuṇṭha, Vaikuṇṭha-Nārāyaṇa: an epithet of Viṣṇu when residing in Vaikuṇṭha heaven.

Vaiṣṇava: cult of Viṣṇu and his followers.

vajra: thunderbolt scepter, associated in Hinduism with Indra, and adopted into Buddhism as the attribute of Vajrapāni and others.

Vajrapāni: a Buddhist deity who has the *vajra* and sometimes also the *ghaṇṭā* as his identifiers.

Vajrayāna: 'diamond vehicle'; a Tantric form of Mahāyāna Buddhism.

vandana: adoration and reverence of a Jain *guru*.

varadamudrā: hand gesture signifying the granting by the deity of a devotees wishes.

Varāha: the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu.

vastavestana: dressing the icon as part of the worship (*pūjā*).

vāstupuruṣamaṇḍala: an architectural grid plan that schematically recreates the structure of the universe, ensuring that a building is correctly aligned with cosmic powers. The grid is divided into 81 squares, each sub-divided into 9 or 8 squares, the central square in which the diagonals meet being reserved for Brahmā. A temple is divided into 64 squares.

Vāstupuruṣa: 'man of the building'; a divinity that inhabits land on which a building is erected that must be honoured with prayers and food.

vāstuvidyā: the science of architecture.
Vāsudeva: 'god of wealth, property'; an early deity, later explained as the father of Kṛṣṇa and Balarāma.
Veda(s): 'knowledge'; the sacred scriptures of the Hindus, regarded by the orthodox as divine revelation, comprising the four *Vedas* (collection of hymns), the *Brahmanas* (priestly treatises), the *Aranyakas* (esoteric texts) and the *Upanishads* (philosophical and mystical treatises).
vedikā: 'railing'; the fence or railing used to enclose a sacred space or shrine, especially a *stūpa*.
vibhūti: white ash that is smeared on the body, believed to have sacred and protective powers; especially used in the worship of Śiva.
vidyādhara: 'bearer of wisdom'; a type of mythical being (in human form) possessing magical knowledge.
vimāna: 'chariot of the gods'; a divine aerial palace, inhabited by the gods; the term applied to the temple as a whole, complete with sanctuary, porches and halls.
vīra: 'hero'; veneration of deified local heroes, especially those who die in combat. Typically 'folk-art' images outside the classical temple tradition.
Vīrabhadra: 'distinguished hero'; a local deity associated with Śiva (emanated from Śiva's sweat or hair, created to punish Dakṣa).
Viṣṇu: the principal Hindu deity, along with Śiva. As the preserver and protector of the cosmic order, Viṣṇu is the most popular of all deities in the Hindu pantheon.
Viṣṇudharmottara-purāṇa: an important text on the arts, dated between the 7th and the 10th centuries and appended to the *Viṣṇupurāṇa*.
Viṣṇupurāṇa: the most important of all Purāṇas, dedicated to Viṣṇu, celebrated as the beginning and end of creation. The core of the work dated probably from the 1st century BCE.
Viśvakarman: 'Architect of the Universe'; divine architect and artist of the gods, representing supreme creative powers.
Viśvarūpa: 'having all forms'; a Universal form of Viṣṇu-Kṛṣṇa; as the Lord appeared to Arjuna in the *Bhagavad Gītā*.
vitarkamudrā: hand gesture of reasoning and the transmission of teachings. Essentially the same as *vyākhyānamudrā*.
vyakta: 'adorned, decorated'; an image that is sculptured and adorned.
yajña: 'sacrifice', 'offering'; the sacrificial worship central to the Vedic religion.
yakśa (male), *yakśī*(female): ancient local deities, nature and guardian spirits, often described in the *Ṛgveda* and often represented in the earliest sculptures as grotesque figures – obese, dwarf-like and misshapen. Later identified as Kubera's followers.
yakśa-caitya: tree shrine that is inhabited by *yakśas*.
yāḷi: mythological lion- or elephant-faced animal represented in rearing posture, a popular architectural motif, especially in south Indian temple architecture.
Yamunā: a river goddess, the personification of the river Jumna, which originates in the Himalayas and joins the Ganges at Allahabad, where the Kumbamelā festival is most famously celebrated.
yantra: geometric design for mental concentration, visual equivalents of the *mantras* ('thought-forms').
yātrā: 'journey'; term used for temple processions in which images are paraded on temple cars (rathas), as well as for journeys undertaken by pilgrims to sacred centres (*tīrthas*).
yoga: ascetic practices combining physical rigour with intellectual discipline, leading to spiritual self-realization. Hence, *yogi*, a person who practises yoga.
yogapaṭṭa: cloth or band that keeps the knees of a meditating yogi firmly in position.
yogāsana: a yogic posture.
yogin: a practitioner of extreme meditative practices and austerities (yoga), especially Śaivite monks who followed the meditation exercises of Patañjali.
yoginī: a lesser female deity, often represented in groups of eight, understood as embodying the power of self-realization.
yoni: female generative organs which, along with the (male) *liṅga*, were seen as a symbol of divine procreative powers.
yuga: age/era of the world.
yūpa: a post, pillar or stake to which a sacrificial victim was tied. It symbolizes Indra's *vajra*, the thunderbolt with which he separated heaven from earth. Thus the *yūpa* became associated with the cosmic pillar connecting these two realms. Used in Vedic rituals, the *yūpa* is octagonal, the eight sides providing protection for the sacrificer from all directions. These pillars retain an important place in the temple schema as the *dhvajastamba* (flagpole) which penetrates the roof so to underscore its role as the bridge between heaven and earth.

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